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Writing and Modernity: Colette's Feminist Fiction.

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in

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by
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ABSTRACT

My choice of Colette's fiction as the subject of critical analysis is one occasioned not only by the richness of her literary corpus, but also by the marginalization of Colette's work as "natural" or "feminine" within the French literary canon. While much has been written on Colette, consideration of her personal life has overly influenced the critical evaluation of her works. I break with the prevalent biographical trend in Colette criticism by approaching seven of her novels from feminist perspectives informed by deconstruction, narratology and psychoanalysis. These productive readings reveal multiple destabilizing effects. A close reading of Chéri locates sites of repression and potential scandal in the text occasioned by an inherent duplicity between narrative and interpretation, a duplicitous vacillation that posits the scandal of textuality itself. In La Fin de Chéri, a shifting temporal framework foregrounds the novel's complex treatment of retrospection. By comparing retrospective activity to the concept of analepsis (retrospection) developed by Gérard Genette, I suggest a new analeptic category, "instances of reflection," that challenges the privileging of "activity" in conventional

narratological theories. In La Vagabonde, L'Entrave, Duo, and Le Toutounier, a close reading demonstrates ways in which the female protagonists destabilize patriarchal systems. These characters deviate from the cultural assimilation of marriage and subsequent confinement to the patriarchal home by resisting exclusionary male discourses of pleasure, by turning toward other women, and by occupying "defamiliarized" spaces. Finally, a psychoanalytical reading of the auroral moments in La Naissance du jour reveals the writing daughter as producer of shifting, expansive "subjectivities" that de-center both phallocentric self-images and the humanist notion of a unified subject by ultimately dissolving the boundaries between subject and object positions. I conclude the study by positing the extent to which these destabilizing effects involve Colette's novels in the feminist epistemological inquiries that participate in contemporary theories of "modernity."

INTRODUCTION

"Je ne pus lui dissimuler le découragement jaloux, l'injuste hostilité qui s'emparent de moi quand je comprends qu'on me cherche toute vive entre les pages de mes romans."

-- Colette, La Naissance du jour

There can be no doubt that Colette, whose literary career spans the years 1900 to 1954, was a prolific writer. The first collection of her complete works, published by Flammarion from 1948 to 1950, measures fifteen volumes. In addition to her novels, Colette wrote numerous collections of short stories, newspaper chronicles, theatrical reviews and letters. She wrote an original play, adapted several of her novels for the stage and collaborated with Ravel, writing a libretto for one of his musical compositions. The quantity and diversity in

Colette's work makes any overview both difficult and questionable since the very notion of an overview assumes both an expectation of brevity and an imposed chronological categorization of works. Acknowledging these difficulties, I will nonetheless begin this study by providing a brief summary of Colette's novelistic production in order to situate the novels upon which I will focus this study. By adapting Margaret Crosland's framework for grouping Colette's work into four "manners" (A Provincial 172), I will avoid, however narrowly, the assumption of a chronological progression in Colette's work by emphasizing instead general orientations in Colette's fiction. Thus, the first novels that Colette produced, the slightly pornographic Claudine series that includes Claudine à l'école (1900), Claudine à Paris (1901), Claudine en ménage (1902), and Claudine s'en va (1903) followed by the Minne series, exemplify a writing style that reflects the taste and control of Colette's first husband, Willy. In a second "manner," Colette gains her independence as a novelist beginning with La Retraite sentimentale (1907), and continuing with such novels as La Vagabonde (1911), L'Entrave (1913), Chéri (1920), Le Blé en herbe (1923), La Fin de Chéri (1926), Duo (1934), Le Toutounier (1939), Julie de Carneilhan (1941) and Gigi (1944). A third "manner" encompasses writings deemed "autobiographical" such as Les Vrilles la vigne (1908), La

Maison de Claudine (1922), Sido (1930), Mes Apprentissages (1936), L'Etoile vesper (1946), and Le Fanal bleu (1949) and a fourth, meditative "manner" could include such novels as La Naissance du jour (1928) and Le Pur et l'impur (1932).

My choice of Colette's fiction as the subject of critical analysis is one occasioned not only by the obvious richness of this literary corpus, but also by the marginal status of Colette's work within the French literary canon, a marginalization that would seem surprising in light of the wide recognition in Colette's lifetime of her literary contributions, notably as Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur (1920), as member of the Belgian Académie royale de langue et littérature française (1936), and as president of the Académie Goncourt (1949). Noting some reasons for Colette's marginalization in her opening remarks at a 1984 colloquium on Colette,[1] Mieke Bal observes that:

> le statut de Colette devant la critique est ambigu: auteure éminemment populaire et, peut-être de ce fait, ignorée par la critique de pointe; auteure par trop accessible et donc inintéressante aux yeux des spécialistes de la théorie littéraire assoiffés d'énigmes d'avant-garde; auteure d'époque, mais pas de la bonne époque canonisée, ni du XIXe siècle, ni du post-modernisme, et donc peu intégrée dans la

> recherche et les études universitaires; auteure exemplaire dans les manuels scolaires de style et de composition, et donc sans surprises pour les littéraires "adultes." (Inconsciences 15)

Michèle Sarde, in her 1978 biography of Colette, explains that this author has been poorly read not merely because her work has not been taken seriously by university critics, but also "parce que son oeuvre n'était pas réputée bonne à mettre entre toutes les mains" (436). Sarde adds:

> Les raisons de cette mise à l'index tiennent à trois ambiguïtés historiques du tempérament et du statut de Colette: écrivain "non intellectuelle" dans un siècle de littérature cérébrale à prétensions philosophiques, marginale socialement, moralement et religieusement, dans une époque encore très pudibonde, et femme dans une ère de phallocratie triomphale. (436)

It is, in fact, Sarde's observation concerning gender ("femme dans une ére de phallocratie triomphale") that constitutes the common, underlying element in both Bal's and Sarde's commentaries.

Jean Larnac, the "defender" of France's writing women in Histoire de la littérature féminine en France, identifies gender as the determining factor in a writer's literary orientation:

> On dirait que, tandis que l'homme aspire à trouver

> Dieu, cherche à s'élever vers un idéal inaccessible et plus ou moins abstrait, la femme, plus proche de la nature, se penche vers elle comme si elle espérait y trouver la consolation des peines qu'elle éprouve auprès de l'homme, son trop nécessaire compagnon. (236)

Thirty years later, Marcel Thiébaut characterizes the divergence between male and female writers in terms similar to Larnac's by first stating: "Vingt générations d'hommes ont vu dans l'amour la voie d'accès au lyrisme, ils l'ont presque confondue avec l'extase ou la religion," in order to dismiss Colette's frank discussion of the flesh: "Pour Colette il n'est que désir ou promesse d'intoxication" (qtd. in Sarde 437). According to these schemas, Larnac and Thiébaut seem to offer a definitive polarization between the refinement and quasi-religious quest of male authors and the earthbound sensuality of their female counterparts, a polarization that would justify the general lack of interest on the part of male writers toward the literary contributions of women.[2] Colette's novels, however, cause discomfort even among the apparently disinterested. For, while Cocteau praised Colette in 1955 for having written candidly about sexuality (59), male critics such as Larnac and Thiébaut have not been able to refrain from condemning a literary candor that effectively challenges the more "refined"

quest that is central to their critical projects.

For this reason, while Larnac pretends to supplant gender-specific criticisms of Colette in Colette, sa vie, son oeuvre, namely that her art "n'est inspiré que par la sensation" (Colette 185) and that she demonstrates an "impuissance à sortir de soi qui caractérise le talent des femmes-auteurs" (Colette 184), his "defense" nonetheless reinforces the culturally overdetermined linkage between women and nature already noted in Histoire de la littérature féminine en France ("la femme, plus proche de la nature, se penche vers elle..."),[3] Thus, Larnac describes Colette's sensibilities by means of a zoological metaphor: "Comme l'animal en liberté, Colette observe avec tous ses sens éveillés" (Colette 185). Moreover, critics contemporary to Larnac employ similar strategies: on the one hand, Paul Reboux continues this appeal to the animal, suggesting that "dans le style de Colette, on sent la joie d'écrire, comme, dans le bondissement d'un animal jeune et plein de force, on sent la joie de vivre. Elle ne me reprochera pas d'user d'une telle image, elle qui, dans l'ordre de ses préférences, semble donner aux animaux un rang de prédilection" (9-10). On the other hand, Robert Sigl complements these animal metaphors with the vegetal: "On pourrait comparer Colette et son oeuvre, pour le phénomène naturel de sa production (et suivant l'image devenue cliché), à un arbre vivace, indéracinable, qui a

grandi infailliblement et porte sans efforts des fruits qui se détachent une fois murs" (12). While Larnac, Sigl and Reboux emphasize Colette's "naturalness" in the 1920s, Colette's official relegation to the status of "natural" writer extends well into the second half of this century. The 1972 rubric "romancier de la terre" in Pierre Brunel's Histoire de la littérature française serves as only one of several examples of Colette's treatment in recent literary anthologies (Brunel 637).[4]

In considering these critical remarks, this discussion has entered the complex terrain of debate on nature versus culture, a dichotomy that readily conflates women into the less valued "natural" component of the dyad. Such assumed or imposed conflation has fueled much feminist discussion regarding patriarchal strategies of devaluation and oppression in Western tradition, strategies that have contributed to the dismissal not only of Colette's work, but of works by many other women as well. In touching on this debate only briefly, I wish to emphasize that Colette's "earthy" treatment in particular critical works and anthologies has contributed greatly to the maintenance of her secondary status as a writer.[5] However, having said this, I am by no means insisting that Colette's work be elevated to a "higher" status within existing literary canons since this elevation would merely support the exclusionary dynamic inherent in such a hierarchic

mode. I wish to suggest instead that Colette's work be reconsidered both by re-evaluating existing Colette criticism and by suggesting critical alternatives to these approaches.

Criticism of Colette's work into the 1960s can be generally broken into three periods, according to Anne Ketchum in her 1968 study, Colette ou la naissance du jour: étude d'un malentendu (42). After the first period spanning 1923 to 1933, Ketchum identifies 1941-1951 as the second period of active Colette criticism, while the third period begins with works appearing after the writer's death in 1954. In each of these periods, the thematic and stylistic commentaries are generally based on an unproblematic identification of Colette's life with her works. In the first critical period that I have already characterized with reference to critics such as Larnac, Sigl and Reboux, Ketchum identifies Amélie Fillon's Colette (1933) as "l'étude la plus solide de cette époque" (45). In commenting on Colette's life and work, Fillon makes the traditional assumption of an inherent linkage between author and text. As Fillon contends, Colette "est trop intelligente, et quoi qu'elle en dise, trop sincère, pour ne pas savoir, mieux que personne, combien de fois elle a fourni l'occasion de la chercher toute vive entre les pages de ses romans" (11). In the second period, Ketchum names Gonzaque Truc's Madame Colette (1941) as a

work that remains "l'un des plus solides et des plus profonds que nous ayons sur Colette" (45). While Truc resists many of the received critical ideas of his time and decries the biographical approach to criticism -- "C'est une naïveté du lecteur que de souhaiter de voir celui dont il aime les livres et c'en est une autre que son étonnement à le découvrir tout autre qu'il ne se l'était figuré" (12) --, he cannot entirely resist a biographical reading. Though his restraint from such interpretation is generally consistent, Truc concludes, nonetheless, in praising a novel in which the female protagonist is named "Colette," La Naissance du jour: "C'est elle ici encore l'héroïne, elle ne se dissimule sous aucun personnage..." (74). Finally, in the third critical period extending from 1954 to the publication date of Ketchum's study (1968), the major critical works, Nicole Houssa's Le Souci de l'expression chez Colette (1958), Margaret Davies's Colette (1961), Maria Le Hardouin's Colette (1956), Elaine Marks's Colette (1960), Thierry Maulnier's Introduction à Colette (1954), and Madeleine Raaphorst-Rousseau's Colette, sa vie et son art (1964) continue, as in the previous two periods, to equate Colette's work closely with her life.[6] Ketchum herself remarks concerning the progression of Colette's works that "chaque ouvrage n'est qu'une étape dont l'essentiel échappe au lecteur s'il ignore tout des préoccupations de

Colette dès ses débuts surtout, et aussi par la suite" (289).

To these three periods, I add a fourth, post-1968 period ushered in for the most part by the renewed interest in women writers brought about by heightened feminist critical activity. While this fourth period contains several works that eschew biography in favor of a structuralist approach, for example, Yannick Resch's Corps féminin, corps textuel (1973) and two works by Mieke Bal, La Complexité d'un roman populaire (1974) and The Narrating and the Focalizing: A Theory of the Agents in Narrative (1983), other critical works, such as Robert Cottrell's Colette (1974), Paul D'Hollander's Colette: ses apprentissages (1978), and Louis Perche's Colette (1976) continue the biographical tradition of the previous critical phases. However, unlike the first three periods during which the biographical approach to criticism follows the French scholarly tradition, a different motivation generally drives the incorporation of biographical elements into Colette criticism in the post-1968 period. For, as part of feminist attempts to re-evaluate women writers, both the writer's life and works undergo a reconsideration and repositioning against the complex backdrop of multiple patriarchal systems. Thus, early works such as Boilley-Godino's L'Homme-objet chez Colette (1972) as well as more recent contributions

such as the first American collection of essays, Colette: The Woman, The Writer (1981), Nicole Ward Jouve's Colette (1987), and especially Nancy K. Miller's essays on Colette ("The Anamnesis of a Female 'I': In the Margins of Self-portrayal" and "Woman of Letters: The Return to Writing in Colette's The Vagabond"), reflect the two-fold approach in which criticism and biography play important revisionary roles.

While this biographically oriented work contributes in important and interesting ways to Colette studies, the virtual absence of other approaches to her work is quite remarkable. In the 1984 colloquium mentioned above, Bal calls attention to the overvaluation of biographical approaches to Colette's work. For Bal, these approaches have remained "en majorité thématiques et stylistiques, elles traitent de l'oeuvre entière plutôt que d'un seul texte et, de ce fait, elles restent globales, et tentent de dégager les caractéristiques de l'oeuvre, voire de l'auteure, plutôt que de pénétrer dans chaque roman particulier," and she comments finally that "la critique féministe ne s'en est guère occupée" (Inconsciences 15). While this last comment reflects a European rather than an American trend in the 1980s, Bal presents an accurate general assessment of the lack of other critical approaches to Colette's work:

le structuralisme, déjà dépassé pour beaucoup, intégré

> par d'autres (dont moi-même), a à peine effleuré l'oeuvre de Colette. L'approche psychocritique n'a pas été systématiquement intégrée. Le déconstructionnisme trouverait les romans trop peu complexes; la sociocritique les trouverait trop peu ancrés dans l'histoire; l'étude de la réception, pourtant si pertinente vu la grande popularité et les nombreux documents de réception disponibles, les a complètement ignorés. . . . Ce n'est que la philologie moderne, l'édition de textes et l'étude de manuscrits qui, comptant parmi les nouvelles approches post-structuralistes, se sont systématiquement attaquées à l'oeuvre de Colette. (Inconsciences 15-16)

It is interesting to note, however, that after calling for critics to move away from biographical approaches, Bal herself undertakes a psychoanalytic reading of Chéri that orients her analysis toward the biographical realm. For Bal likens the relationship between the lovers Léa and Chéri to that of Colette and her mother, Sido, in order to demonstrate that the generally accepted notion in Colette criticism of an idyllic relationship between Colette and Sido hampers more productive critical interpretations of Colette and her works. Bal dismisses the popular biographical version of Colette's close relationship to her mother in stating: "Mesurer combien, enfant, elle

en est restée désemparée, serait une façon de les prendre davantage au sérieux, Colette et son oeuvre" (Inconsciences 23). However, even as she attempts to disrupt the dominant mode of interpreting Colette's life, she relies almost exclusively upon biographical elements.

I call attention to the biographical trend that characterizes Colette criticism in order to emphasize the extent to which this particular approach has enjoyed a certain exclusivity.[7] For this study, I have chosen the texts to be examined -- Chéri (1920), La Fin de Chéri (1926), La Vagabonde (1911), L'Entrave (1913), Duo (1934), Le Toutounier (1939) and La Naissance du jour (1928) -- in a two-fold process, first by selecting works that have received much critical attention (Chéri, La Vagabonde, Duo and La Naissance du jour), and subsequently, by including the undervalued sequels of the first three of these novels (La Fin de Chéri, L'Entrave and Le Toutounier respectively).[8] I will break with the prevalent trend in Colette criticism by approaching the novels from non-biographical critical perspectives that provide new insights into Colette's texts rather than into her "motivation" or "experience." In focusing this study on other than biographical issues, however, I do not intend to take on a universalizing tone, as does, for example, Roland Barthes in "La Mort de l'auteur" as he asserts that the author need not be considered when analyzing a text.

By thus calling agency into question and freeing the text from the confines imposed by traditional critical analysis, Barthes implicitly calls for the "death" of female authors, a gesture that would prevent them from receiving long-deserved recognition for their work and a gesture that is contrary to a continuing feminist project dedicated to recovering women's writing.[9] In saying this, I recognize the theoretical difficulties inherent in the feminist recovery project, one that often assumes a direct linguistic opening onto the lived experience of the author as a whole and determinable subject. I participate in the feminist recovery project not only in seeking to contribute to the body of critical work on women's writing, I do so also in the very choice of Colette's work as the focus for this study, that is, in acknowledging the initial importance of Colette's "gender" to the exploration of inscribed sites of resistance to patriarchal structures in her work.

The assumption often made that a study such as this should employ one critical approach is not one that I share in undertaking this study. Instead, I will analyze Colette's texts in a responsive way, choosing the critical approaches that lend themselves to each text and connecting these approaches by reading both the novels and the theory from feminist perspectives. It is the diversity of feminist theory, its ability to question and contribute

to the many fields of theoretical inquiry, that makes these different readings possible, and that will shape this study.[10] Moreover, given that Colette's oeuvre has been treated so minimally and that most of this treatment shares a biographical orientation, I consider Colette's novels to be ideal texts for multiple reading strategies. Through the readings that I propose, I will locate sites that destabilize dominant cultural systems in Colette's texts both on the "level of story" and on the "level of discourse" (a distinction that I discuss in Chapter II), and by reading Colette's novels against various critical theories, I will demonstrate the ways in which the novels reveal androcentric bias at different points in the theories themselves. It is these sites of destabilization, both in terms of Colette's texts and in terms of the theoretical approaches applied to them, that will generate my conclusions.

Thus, in a deconstructive reading of Chéri (Chapter I), I will locate sites of intersection between several differing codes for women, sites that first reveal undecidability and repression before ultimately erupting as the scandal of textuality itself. Using a narratological approach as a means to study La Fin de Chéri (Chapter II), I will analyze the novel's temporal order on the "level of story" and its treatment of past events through analepsis (retrospection) on the "level of

discourse," in order to demonstrate the ways in which what I call "instances of reflection" can lead to a wider analeptic concept that affects notions of temporality and of "active" plot upon which conventional narratology is based. I will continue a narratological consideration of plot in La Vagabonde, L'Entrave, Duo and Le Toutounier (Chapter III), but from the perspective of "endings," by identifying specific techniques deployed by female protagonists in their attempts to resist the culturally determined marriage destination. A close reading of the passages referring to daybreak in La Naissance du jour (Chapter IV) will reveal this auroral moment as the expression of a feminine imaginary space that diverges from the Imaginary as described in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and enables a particularly destabilizing technique for writing subjectivities. Finally, in my concluding remarks, I will consider the extent to which the various intersections between my readings of Colette's texts and contemporary theories employed in this study engage Colette's works in terms of wider questions of modernity.

NOTES

[1] For a compilation of colloquium papers and discussions, see Bray.

[2] Sarde points to anti-intellectual attacks against Colette such as that of Julien Benda who deplored Colette's ignorance of Latin, an ignorance that, according to Benda, would limit her to "des 'états d'âme élémentaires'" (437).

[3] Larnac turns the accusations launched against Colette into praise by grouping her with male authors whose celebrated works incorporate personal musings (Saint Augustin, Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Constant). However, he does not hesitate to turn similar accusations against Colette's contemporary, Anna de Noailles (Comtesse de Noailles 223). For a current reinterpretation of Larnac, see Marks's "Odor di Femina."

[4] In Lagarde and Michard's Les Grands Auteurs Français (1971), Colette is listed under the rubric, "L'homme devant la nature" (788), while in the fourth volume of Henri Lemaître's La Littérature française (1971), Colette is dubbed "Reine de la terre" (248). The concluding remarks concerning Colette in Pierre-Olivier Walzer's Littérature Française, le XXe siècle 1896-1920 (1975) aptly sum up this trend: "Ce luxe stylistique, destiné à traduire le plus merveilleux des mondes donnés, ne fait

jamais que refléter, chez la fille de Sido, une manière native qu'elle a d'être somptueusement naturelle" (331).

[5] For an early cultural argument concerning the nature/culture dichotomy, see Ortner; for more current discussions of the manner in which this dichotomy manifests itself, see Fuss and Homans.

[6] In focusing these introductory remarks on trends in Colette criticism, I do not comment upon the many biographies that have been devoted to the author. Nicole Ward Jouve notes that "the first striking thing when you start looking at the work on Colette is the high proportion of biographies that exist" (11). Biographies of note written since Colette's death include Beaumont and Parinaud, Crosland (both Madame Colette, A Provincial in Paris and Colette, The Difficulty of Loving), Goudeket, Lottman, Mitchell, Phelps (both Autobiographie tirée des oeuvres de Colette and Belles Saisons: A Colette Scrapbook), Claude and Vincenette Pichois, Reymond (Colette et la Côte d'Azur), and Sarde.

[7] For recent essays that contain significant biographical elements, see Deltel, Flieger, Fraiman, Ladimer, Lilienfeld, and Reymond (Le Rire de Colette).

[8] Elaine Marks expresses the fairly general opinion that Colette's sequels are inferior works (Colette 138).

[9] For an insightful discussion of the importance of the author in feminist theory, see Walker.

[10] I use the terms "feminist" and "feminism" advisedly since these terms suggest a universal feminist position when there are a great many feminisms. I also wish to acknowledge from the outset that while I use the term "feminist" to describe many of the theorists to whom I refer in this study, there are those who have rejected the term since, for them, it represents a bourgeois humanist movement. For incisive comments concerning the intellectual differences in French feminist thought, see Jardine's introduction to Kristeva's "Women's Time."

CHAPTER I

A Question of Equivocations: Narrative Scandal in Chéri

> "Artiste? Oh! vraiment, cher ami, mes amants sont bien bavards...."
>
> -- Colette, Chéri

From its opening pages, Chéri reflects a social coding of the "artistic" courtesan milieu that flourished during France's Belle Epoque. The character Léa, a demi-mondaine whose career spans the Belle Epoque, mirrors most particularly the historical figure, Suzanne Derval (Phelps, Belles Saisons 140), as well as other celebrated demi-mondaines such as Liane de Pougy, Caroline Otero, and Emilienne d'Alençon (Guilleminault 169-193). Léa, like her historical models, abides by strict codes that contain her in a confining opposition to her bourgeois counterpart, the virtuous wife. The nineteenth-century French feminist, Maria Deraismes, identifies these social codes as an intricate series of oppositions necessary to the masculine pursuit of pleasure within bourgeois patriarchy. Claire Goldberg Moses summarizes Deraismes:

> Although society, according to Deraismes, seems to admire the courtesan more than the "honest" woman, the

> courtesan is man's victim in the sense that men have created her to satisfy needs they cannot satisfy within the sterile marriages they themselves have created. The life of the courtesan exists entirely outside the laws of marriage and thus outside its protection. And indeed, the courtesan lives as a parasite on marriage, sucking from it all passion and joy and thereby destroying it. And yet, only she really commands men's respect: "The great sacrifices, the follies of passion pushed to the extreme of sacrificing honor and life are inspired by women who have lost it [virginity] long ago." (183)

For Deraismes, patriarchy clearly establishes separately coded social spheres for the "honest" bourgeois woman and the demi-mondaine.[1] While the sphere encircling the "honest" bourgeoise rotates on a simple, singular axis, one determined by virginity and its corollary, marital fidelity, the courtesan's sphere spins in the reverse direction on the more complex axis of sexual experience and multiple relationships.[2] In effect, each sphere consists of a set of codes which resembles the other in that each functions as the other's opposite. Yet, as I will argue, the elements of these codes in Chéri do not remain completely separated. Instead, elements undergo transposition from one sphere to the other, an interchange

of coded elements that prefigures scandal's eruptive potential. As Ross Chambers notes, scandal can be defined as a well kept secret that finally cannot be kept, a site of repression that cannot be repressed.[3] During these potentially scandalous moments, what is repressed in each code (the inevitable intrusion into it of its inverse) becomes evident either as repression or, more dramatically, as scandalous eruption. Considering Chambers's definition, scandal may be found in various literary texts that describe historical periods other than the Belle Epoque. However, Chéri represents a particularly interesting case since, according to literary historical accounts, this novel already enjoys a reputation as a scandalous text. Thus, my principal questions are: when and how does scandal erupt in a text that is already considered scandalous?

Before proceeding to these questions, I wish to qualify my statement that Chéri is already a scandalous text in terms of literary history. As a narrative in which an aging courtesan, Léa, attracts and retains Chéri, a lover who is half her age, Chéri initially enjoyed wide acceptance from French women while French men generally found the intensity of the attachment of a young man to a woman bordering on old age a distasteful reversal of existing patriarchal social codes.[4] In other words, while Chéri received much praise from authors such as André Gide

(Crosland, A Provincial 96-97) and Marcel Proust (Pichois and Forbin 40), the wider male readership often considered this novel "scandalous." This generally negative male reception was not only based on Chéri's unacceptable amorous intensity, but also on the unorthodox role played by the courtesan.[5] In earlier male narratives, the courtesan often served a "morally instructive" purpose for society as both seducer and destroyer of men (for example, Manon Lescaut and Nana). The fact that Colette presents Léa without the expected balance of moral condemnation contributes another scandalous dimension to a text that thus proves itself to be scandalous for numerous reasons (Crosland, A Provincial 96). The challenge here will be to look beyond these thematic transgressions of literary tradition to the ways in which repressed dynamics reveal textual scandal.

1. Reading Models

Chéri contains two "literary" samples that provide insights into a certain textual duplicity and the ways in which this duplicity might be read in the rest of the text. For this reason, I will return to these models throughout the chapter as embedded points of reference. Chambers defines duplicity in part as "une lecture double du texte, selon la 'fonction narrative' et selon la

'fonction textuelle'," the "fonction narrative" constituting a "relation narrateur-narrataire" and the "fonction textuelle" a "fonction de lecture" (Mélancolie 18-20). In the broadest sense, these narrative and textual functions can be understood as the complex play between what the text "says" (its narrative systems) and what it "means" (its interpretive possibilities or textuality), a relation that depends on the reader's willingness to enter into the text's playful and play-filled complexities. By examining two different moments in Chéri, the first in which Léa functions as a letter writer, and the second, as a novel reader, this duplicity reveals itself in particularly striking ways.

The first literary model emerges as Léa, who is desperate to flee Paris after Chéri's marriage and who has already circulated the possibility of her enjoying a mysterious new lover, writes a farewell message to an old rival, Chéri's mother, Charlotte:

> Ma chère Charlotte,
>
> Tu ne m'en voudras pas si je pars sans te dire au revoir, et en gardant mon petit secret. Je ne suis qu'une grande folle!...Bah! la vie est courte au moins qu'elle soit bonne.
>
> Je t'embrasse bien affectueusement. Tu feras mes amitiés au petit quand il reviendra.

Ton incorrigible,

Léa.

P.-S. -- Ne te dérange pas pour venir interviewer mon maître d'hôtel ou le concierge, personne ne sait rien chez moi. (C 80-81)[6]

By writing this short missive, Léa establishes herself as the successful author of a duplicitous text, and in rewriting the letter three times before sending it, she attests to the difficulty of her task. Once completed, however, the result is a subtle and deliberate mixing of "truth" and "fiction" that masks the reasons for her departure and that also underscores the play between narrative and interpretation. The letter functions as an overt reading lesson that allows the reader to interpret Léa's "petit secret" differently than do the fictive characters, Charlotte and Chéri, whose interpretations of the letter later in the text reveal naive readings. By failing to recognize alternative readings of Léa's missive, Charlotte and Chéri demonstrate the power of the literal and figurative letter to persuade and manipulate.

Moreover, while the letter model can be read as an example of the double operation that Chambers describes, a second doubling dynamic, this time viewed in structural terms, also inhabits this literary model. For the letter appears at the exact midpoint of the novel, both in terms of chapters and plot, dividing the narrative

between the events that are predicted in the first chapter (Chéri's marriage, Chéri and Léa's separation) and the unforeseen events that constitute the novel's second half. The letter seals the first sequence of events through its overtly stated content (Léa, forever living the high life, is leaving Paris with a new lover) while the letter's covert content (Léa's lone departure in grief over the loss of Chéri) foreshadows the emotional confusion that will pervade the rest of the novel. In short, the letter functions as a central fold in the text, providing structural cohesion through its multiple doubling operations.

The second literary model occurs at another crucial moment, in the paragraph directly preceding the novel's final scenes of reunion and separation between Chéri and Léa. When Léa turns to reading in an attempt to distract herself one evening, she selects a detective story:

> Elle planta d'une main négligente un peigne blond sur sa nuque et choisit sans grand espoir un roman policier sur un rayon, dans un cabinet obscur. Elle n'avait pas le goût des reliures et ne s'était jamais déshabituée de reléguer ses livres au fond des placards, avec les cartons vides et les boîtes de pharmacie.
>
> Comme elle lisait, penchée, la batiste fine et froide de son grand lit ouvert, le gros timbre de la

cour retentit. (C 156)

As a genre, the detective story clearly engages the reader in an overt reading contract. The reader knows that his/her reading will be rewarded eventually with a satisfying resolution as the crime is solved. This guarantee of closure insures the reader's willingness to read (Belsey 79).[7] Yet while the overt agreement stipulates a certain surface disparity between narrative and interpretation (the reader knows that some clues are "true" while others are red herrings), it is only in the contractual fine print that an attentive reader will discover the underlying disparity between these literal clues and the very possibility of interpreting them (certain clues may support different solutions resulting in indeterminations that undermine closure's possibility). The resulting tension within the reading contract between the boldly printed hermeneutic model that tends to produce closure as it seeks solutions and the finely printed semiotic model that tends to remain open, reinforces the inherently duplicitous challenge which the tension between "la fonction narrative" and "la fonction textuelle" presents.

Given the tension between the bold and fine print, it is interesting that Léa faces the reading challenge with both hopelessness and determination: she chooses the detective story from a darkened cupboard where she has

thrown it haphazardly among empty boxes and medicine bottles "sans grand espoir," yet she assumes a physical pose ("penchée") that suggests her concentrated determination. The juxtaposition of Léa's skepticism as she contemplates reading with the optimism which her physical demeanor displays at the actual moment of reading, suggests that Léa, a successful writer of a duplicitous text, may be both drawn and repulsed by the duplicity that reading requires. Is it, perhaps, for this reason that she resists the detective story genre by relegating seemingly light and predictable books to a dark and disorderly place? Although the detective story genre promises to be a light diversion (as light as "les cartons vides" perhaps, or like them, devoid of content), Léa does not prepare for light consumption. She plans to internalize the detective story from her (sick)bed as she would the medicine in "les boîtes de pharmacie" in an attempt to cure her heartache and boredom. Unlike Charlotte and Chéri for whom reading remains an unreflective act, Léa's ambivalent attitude toward reading manifests the tension between narrative and interpretation, a tension that is necessary both for scandal's repression and, more importantly, for its ultimate eruption.

2. Equivocations

Keeping in mind the disparity between narrative and textuality that the literary models illustrate, I propose a reading that will demonstrate the tensions between "la fonction narrative" and "la fonction textuelle" in Chéri. In focusing on these tensions, I will propose an interpretation of Chéri that belies the novel's seemingly simple style. I begin by considering the characters of the courtesan society in Chéri, characters that, in bourgeois terms, inhabit a milieu équivoque.[8] Within this equivocal sphere, I will examine theatricality and sexual undecidability, two examples par excellence of the duplicitous disparity between "saying" and "meaning."[9] I will argue that these duplicities which I shall refer to as textual "splitting," while functioning "naturally" in the courtesan milieu équivoque, would prove "scandalous" were they to occur instead within the opposing bourgeois sphere.[10]

Equivocations and equi-vocations flourish in Chéri as Léa, in her equal vocations as courtesan and actress, demonstrates the "theatrical" duplicity upon which her continued survival depends.[11] Léa masks herself through the mediating techniques of costume, make-up, and ruse in order to equivocate, to confound truth and falsity, reality and illusion, constantly renewing her mask in order to conceal from herself and others any signs of

aging. She maintains careful control of her appearance, waiting until Chéri leaves the bedroom before rising, and quickly applying her make-up before his return. She also relies on carefully chosen colors to offset her fading beauty: "A présent il me faut le blanc du linge près du visage, le rose très pâle pour les dessous et les déshabillés" (C 19). Moreover, she manages to fool Chéri until the novel's final scene by diverting attention from her aging body through subtle changes in her habits. For example, she stops wearing her heavy necklace of forty-nine pearls "car Chéri, amoureux des belles perles et qui les caressait le matin, eût remarqué trop souvent que le cou de Léa, épaissi, perdait sa blancheur et montrait, sous la peau, des muscles détendus" (C 10). Léa's attention to her appearance never flags even on a lazy Sunday afternoon in the country when Charlotte offers Léa a kimono, which Léa refuses: "Ces abandons de l'après-midi l'écoeuraient. Jamais son jeune amant ne l'avait surprise défaite, ni le corsage ouvert, ni en pantoufles dans le jour. 'Nue, si on veut,' disait-elle, 'mais pas dépoitraillée'" (C 26).

In addition to her costumes, make-up, and carefully staged movements, Léa and the courtesans in her group take on stage names as well. Léa, is introduced as "Léonie Vallon, dite Léa de Lonval" (C 9) while Chéri's mother, who has never been married, calls herself Madame Peloux

and still other members of the circle take on more ostentatious titles (e.g. la baronne de la Berche). Performers for a largely bourgeois audience, the courtesans adopt stage names that either imitate the aristocratic social standing coveted by their bourgeois clients (Léa's particle or the title "baronne") or mimic bourgeois respectability (Madame Peloux). In either case, the courtesans' names create only the illusion of truth that theatricality requires. Furthermore, Chéri gestures toward theatricality through the script-like quality of the text. Direct spoken dialogue constitutes a major portion of the novel while the minimal descriptive passages function as detailed stage directions that indicate motivation and stage movement.

As the stage names and script-like text suggest, role-playing constitutes a complex theatrical component within Chéri. In addition to Léa's global role as the successful courtesan who prides herself on her ability to maintain a cool detachment, both Léa and Chéri perform interdependent roles on at least two different stages. On a public stage, Léa plays the mature initiator chosen by the young initiate, Chéri, for his passage into the sensual world. For Léa, Chéri functions as the guarantor of her youth, as physical proof to her rivals of her continuing beauty: "Ses contemporaines jalousaient sa santé imperturbable, les jeunes femmes, que la mode de

1912 bombait déjà du dos et du ventre, raillaient le poitrail avantageux de Léa, -- celles-ci et celles-là lui enviaient également Chéri" (C 10). On a private stage, Léa plays the role of Chéri's nursemaid/mother, perpetuating his dependence by scolding and pampering him for six years out of her own need to play the maternal role. In the opening bedroom scene, Léa demonstrates her maternal technique, responding to Chéri's whining outburst with "tu ne saurais donc jamais t'habiller tout seul?," after which Léa "prit des mains de Chéri, le faux-col qu'elle boutonna, la cravate qu'elle noua" (C 14). Chéri complements Léa's maternal role by remaining a needful, selfish child, devoid of any sense of responsibility or consideration toward others. In the novel's opening scene, Chéri announces his selfish character loudly: "'La mienne, dit Chéri avec une importance bouffonne. MA corbeille de MES bijoux de MON mariage...'" (C 8, emphasis in original).

These various manifestations of theatricality (costumes, stage-names, scripts and role-playing) indicate sites of textual "splitting" in which duplicity reveals itself as deception. Furthermore, the equivocations inherent in Léa's masks, stage names and role-playing function as a "natural" part of the equi-vocations to which she is called within the courtesan sphere. As a celebrated participant in the <u>milieu équivoque</u>, Léa

embraces duplicity "naturally," performing her equally vocal roles without effort in one continuous act of distraction.

In addition, Léa encourages a second mode of textual "splitting" -- duplicity as undecidability -- in the form of Chéri's ambiguous sexuality. The physical description of Chéri in the opening page of the novel generally highlights the "masculine" characteristics of Chéri's body, yet the juxtaposition of his well-formed body with the pearl necklace that he has clasped around his neck, immediately suggests gender ambiguity:

> Il se tenait devant un miroir long, appliqué au mur entre les deux fenêtres, et contemplait son image de très beau et très jeune homme, ni grand ni petit, le cheveu bleuté comme un plumage de merle. Il ouvrit son vêtement de nuit sur une poitrine mate et dure, bombée en bouclier, et la même étincelle rose joua sur ses dents, sur le blanc de ses yeux sombres et sur les perles du collier. (C 6)

Frequently, descriptions of Chéri's body include "feminine" characteristics. In the adolescent years prior to his liaison with Léa, the wealthy foreign women at the gaming tables of Monte Carlo referred to him, significantly, as their "petite (sic) chef-d'oeuvre" (C 28-29, emphasis added). Likewise, at age nineteen, during the first summer of his liaison with Léa, the description

of Chéri's physical enjoyment as "gai à table, impatient au lit, il ne livrait rien de lui que lui-même, et restait mystérieux comme une courtisane" (C 47), sustains this ambiguity. As a man in his mid-twenties, Chéri still retains the "feminine" attributes of his adolescence, as in the novel's opening scene when Chéri strikes a "feminine" pose, sitting "en amazone" on the corner of Léa's bed (C 7).

This undecidability in Chéri's nature attracts Léa who, as a member of the milieu équivoque, finds Chéri's ambiguities sexually arousing. She has taught Chéri about pleasure and reveals her attraction to his less-than-masculine form as she contemplates Chéri's hand, "La main . . . non point féminine, mais un peu plus belle qu'on l'eût voulu, main que Léa avait cent fois baisée sans servilité, baisée pour le plaisir, pour le parfum..." (C 26-27). Similarly, in the opening bedroom scene, Léa must resist her feelings of sexual arousal as she helps Chéri dress for a luncheon engagement:

> Elle lui brossa les oreilles, rectifia la raie, fine et bleûatre, qui divisait les cheveux noirs de Chéri, lui toucha les tempes d'un doigt mouillé de parfum et baisa rapidement, parce qu'elle ne put s'en défendre, la bouche tentante qui respirait si près d'elle. (C 14)

At the end of the novel, Léa's sexual pleasure becomes

even more evident as Chéri and Léa make love for the last time:

> Cependant elle voyait avec une sorte de terreur approcher l'instant de sa propre défaite, elle endurait Chéri comme un supplice, le repoussait de ses mains sans force et le retenait entre ses genoux puissants. Enfin elle saisit au bras, cria faiblement, et sombra dans cet abîme d'où l'amour remonte pâle, taciturne et plein du regret de la mort. (C 167)

As much as Léa is attracted by this ambiguity in Chéri, his young wife, Edmée, does not fully enjoy the results of Léa's sensual lessons. The daughter of a demi-mondaine, Edmée nonetheless has received a bourgeois education in the near isolation of a convent school and therefore does not comprehend the subtleties of the milieu équivoque in which Chéri has been raised. A withdrawn young woman with no prior sexual experience, Edmée does not find her physical relationship with Chéri satisfying. When Chéri tries to defend his behavior in their unhappy marriage by saying, "'Est-ce que j'ai une chambre à part? Est-ce que je ne te fais pas bien l'amour?'," Edmée states her opinion precisely: "'Tu appelles cela l'amour...?'" (C 100-101). Edmée thus proves to be unprepared for the "splitting" that occurs as a matter of course within the

milieu équivoque, and must employ derogatory bourgeois terms in order to condemn Chéri's sexual and gender ambiguities, stammering: "'Tu...tu parles comme une cocotte'" (C 102). Unlike Léa for whom "splitting" in herself and in others occurs "naturally," Edmée, as virtual outsider to this milieu and as possessor of bourgeois discourse, rejects Chéri's undecidability and, with it, the duplicitous milieu équivoque that he inhabits.

3. Reunion, Scandal and the Mirror Image

By examining various aspects of Chéri thus far, I have established that the text presents duplicity as an overt and fundamental dynamic of the milieu équivoque. However, while the textual "splitting" that produces theatricality's deception as well as sexual undecidability circulates freely within this demi-mondaine society, I contend that such "splitting" would erupt as scandal were it to be transposed into the corresponding bourgeois sphere. For in polite bourgeois society of the Belle Epoque, the social stigma traditionally attached to the theatrical milieu and especially to the women who participate in it, the strict moral codes that govern bourgeois women's sexual conduct, and the clear gender lines that separate men and women, all attest to an intolerance toward undecidability.[12] In short, this sphere

rotates on a "unified" axis, turning as a function of the "oneness" inherent in patriarchal systems that code the unit "one" (i.e. God, the phallus, the family) as ultimately desirable. This penchant for "unity" within the bourgeois sphere precludes the "doubleness" that duplicity demands. Thus, the identification of textual "splitting" within the courtesan milieu of Chéri as a duplicity that functions "naturally" highlights the "unnaturalness" of such duplicity within the bourgeois social sphere. In other words, while duplicity does not produce scandal within the milieu équivoque, it would manifest potentially eruptive powers within the bourgeois sphere. Thus, I return to a more developed version of my original questions: if the manifestations of textual "splitting" that I have identified in Chéri do not erupt as scandal within the courtesan sphere, when and how does scandal erupt within the text? I will argue that scandal erupts as a the result of a transposition of coded elements, in this case, the imposition of bourgeois elements into the courtesan's equivocal sphere. More specifically, the transposed "unity" that functions "naturally" in bourgeois society creates "unnatural" effects when transposed onto the milieu équivoque. In short, I contend that scandal erupts in the courtesan sphere as the effect of the transposition of bourgeois "decidability" and "unity" which force the reunification

of textual "splitting."

In a corollary to his definition of scandal as a site of repression that does not remain repressed, Chambers identifies gossip as a means by which scandalous repression is often revealed. In Chéri, gossip discloses two instances of repression. Each instance involves the elision through ellipsis of a traditionally "unifying" bourgeois ceremony and the subsequent emergence of each scandalous event through some form of gossip. The first and foremost unifying ceremony, one that bourgeois society would naturally display, is Chéri and Edmée's wedding. However, in Chéri, this event is elided through an ellipsis that transports the reader from the moment of separation of Chéri and Léa before the wedding to an undetermined day in Charlotte's garden following the wedding, thereby demonstrating the resistance of a duplicitous text to the permanent act of bourgeois "unification" or joining that the marriage ceremony represents. A "unifying" ceremony par excellence during the Belle Epoque, the wedding precludes all instances of "splitting" as two persons and their respective property are incorporated into one social and legal unit. It is significant then, that such a unifying event be elided in an already scandalous text. The resulting discursive repression through elision marks a site for potential scandal which the text partially releases through gossip.

The depth of the repression (and thus the seriousness of the potential scandal) is indicated, first, through the postponement of the wedding gossip until well into the chapter following the elliptical jump. Subsequently, when gossip finally emerges, it does so in a limited way through the escape of a few brief comments within Charlotte's circle of friends about Edmée, Chéri and Edmée's mother, Marie-Laure:

> "Madame Charlotte nous a raconté la cérémonie, bêla Mme Aldonza. Sous la fleur d'oranger la jeune dame Peloux était un rêve.
>
> -- Une madone! Une madone! rectifia Charlotte Peloux de tous ses poumons, soulevée par un saint délire. Jamais, jamais on n'avait vu un spectacle pareil! Mon fils marchait sur les nuées! Sur les nuées!... Quel couple! Quel couple!
>
> -- Sous la fleur d'oranger... tu entends, ma folie? murmura Lili... Dis donc, Charlotte, et notre belle-mère? Marie-Laure?"
>
> L'oeil impitoyable de Mme Peloux étincela.
>
> "Oh! elle... Déplacée, absolument déplacée..." (C 72-73)

While these comments describe the wedding to a certain extent, the details of this scandalous ceremony remain, for the most part, in a repressed state.

A second elided element within the elliptical jump

described above is Chéri and Edmée's honeymoon trip to Italy. This bourgeois ceremony renders sexual union legitimate, thereby functioning as another intolerable "unifying" force from the perspective of a duplicitous narrative. Like the wedding, this bourgeois ritual that socially marks the end of a woman's virgin status remains a site of repression to be revealed through gossip. After the elliptical jump, Madame Peloux, surrounded by a circle of friends, inserts the subject of the honeymoon into the conversation: "Et qu'est-ce que c'est, clama Mme Peloux soudain lyrique, qu'est-ce que c'est que ce temps, à côté de celui qu'ils doivent avoir en Italie!" (C 68, emphasis in original). Later in the text, the honeymoon figures into the narrative briefly as Léa, preparing for her own departure from Paris, muses:

> "Vingt-six octobre. Il y a un mois juste que Chéri est marié. . . . Ils font l'amour en Italie, à cette heure-ci, sans doute. Et ça, ce que ça m'est égal..." (C 79)

And finally, after Chéri and Edmée return from their honeymoon, the only revelation of details about the trip occurs in a brief exchange between Chéri and his mother:

> "Sais-tu, mon trésor aimé, que je ne trouve pas que tu aies très bonne mine?
>
> -- C'est la nuit en chemin de fer," répondit brièvement Chéri.

> Mme Peloux n'osait pas dire toute sa pensée. Elle trouvait son fils changé.
>
> "Il est... oui, il est fatal," décréta-t-elle; et elle acheva tout haut avec enthousiasme:
>
> "C'est l'Italie!
>
> -- Si tu veux," concéda Chéri. (C 83)

In effect, the text only releases snatches of information that serve as periodic indicators of the disruption that such rituals cause in the courtesan milieu.

While Chéri and Edmée's mothers impose the unifying rites of wedding and honeymoon on their children in order to achieve a fiscal unity (i.e. the consolidation of two fortunes), the intrusion of such unifying bourgeois ceremonies creates tension within the duplicitous text that marks both the repression of scandal and its partial disclosure through gossip. However, this dynamic of repression and of partial disclosure which has, until now, merely marked sites of potential scandal, serves as a catalyst for the novel's denouement -- the site of fully articulated scandal. Thus the narrative can be divided into two parts: the bulk of the novel in which scandal remains virtually repressed, and its final scenes in which scandal erupts. Returning to the reading models, this division parallels the detection or non-detection of duplicity by various characters. The letter model functions similarly to the bulk of the text in that Chéri

and Charlotte fail to detect the missive's duplicity just as gossip hints at, but does not fully expose, sites of scandal in the milieu équivoque. On the contrary, the detective story, like the text's final scenes, admits the uneasy possibility of duplicity's detection, an uneasiness that Léa demonstrates as she halfheartedly engages the reading process. For while the narrative attempts a final reunification in the closing scenes, a reunification that would seem to imitate the boldly printed promise of closure in the detective story contract, such a reunifying gesture in Chéri results, instead, in a scandalous explosion.

In the final scenes of reunion between the lovers, Chéri demands that Léa reveal the duplicity of the letter model by asking her if she does indeed have another lover. As Léa admits to the letter's deceptiveness with her confession: "'Non, je n'ai pas d'amant. Je t'aime...'" (167), she renounces an open semiosis in favor of closure. No longer able to sustain the duplicitous dynamic inherent in the letter model, Léa instead adopts the "unifying" bourgeois gesture of "truth-telling," and as René Girard suggests, "the truth itself becomes scandalous and this is scandal at its worst" (315). By truthfully admitting her love for Chéri, Léa triggers the scandalous reunification of textual "splitting," an act with disastrous consequences that become immediately evident. No longer

admitting a multiple textuality, Léa's ability "to read" Chéri's complexities diminishes. Overwhelmed by her emotions of "true" love, she fails to recognize that Chéri does not share these emotions and that he has, in fact, returned to her on his old terms, as the needful, jealous child. Whereas, in the past, Léa was able to anticipate Chéri's movements and thoughts, after admitting her love for him, she is surprised and saddened that he does not respond with the enthusiastic words that she had anticipated. Instead, he motions toward the bed in a gesture that disappoints her, and although she continues to play the role of the mistress, she begins to forget the carefully rehearsed movements that her multiple roles require. While Chéri feigns sleep and spies on her, she does not follow her usual rule of rising after him in order to apply her make-up in his absence, and instead allows the morning light to illuminate her directly. Through this unrehearsed action, she reveals an aging face to her lover in unflatteringly "truthful" detail:

> Pas encore poudrée, une maigre torsade de cheveux sur la nuque, le menton double et le cou dévasté, elle s'offrait imprudemment au regard invisible. (C 174)[13]

This carelessness on the morning after their love-making is accompanied by Léa's even deeper commitment to "truthful" communication. She expands upon her previous evening's pronouncement of love with a further admission:

> "Ah! . . . quand je pense à tout ce que je ne t'ai pas donné, à tout ce que je ne t'ai pas dit... Quand je pense que je t'ai cru un petit passant comme les autres, un peu plus précieux que les autres... Que j'étais bête, de ne pas comprendre que tu étais mon amour, l'amour, l'amour qu'on n'a qu'une fois...." (C 176)

Following this fateful avowal of her own desire for "unity" ("l'amour qu'on n'a qu'une fois"), Léa senses resistance in Chéri and begins to perceive her loss of control over the scene. Chéri responds strongly to her sincerity by confronting her ("Je t'accuse") with "rien que la vérité" (C 178) when he says that she will always see him as a child. Chéri's objection to his long-lived role as the child frightens Léa who finds herself without a script for such a frank and unrehearsed dialogue. She realizes that her relationship with Chéri has reached a dangerously new stage, a stage upon which she hears her old, familiar lines reverberate back to her in ineffectual and false tones: "En même temps elle jugeait mou et faux le son de sa voix: 'Que c'est mal dit... C'est dit en mauvais théâtre...'" (C 179).

"Bad theatre" fails to maintain its representational authority through deceptively convincing duplicity, showing instead the extent of its falseness and illusion. Léa, the consummate actress, can no longer depend on

familiar scripts or roles, and her gesture toward "reunification" results, therefore, in the loss of her theatrical abilities. Consequently, her roles as mother/nursemaid and mistress soon lose their validity: when Chéri challenges the false underpinnings of their mother/child relationship by accusing Léa of purposefully distorting his age, Léa's mother/nursemaid role begins to fall away. Although she continues to refer to herself as Chéri's "maman," albeit "dévoyée" (C 189), it is significant that as Chéri prepares his final departure, Léa breaks with her established pattern and does not actually help him dress. Moreover, she can no longer play her role of mistress without falseness: when she reacts in anger to Chéri's rejection by lashing out against Edmée, Chéri responds with equal anger. He is not so much upset by the comments regarding his wife as he is that Léa no longer performs the necessary roles. Not only has she invalidated her role as mistress by letting her true emotions show, but Chéri further requires that she remain unchanged, that she be "ma Nounoune, chic type je t'ai connue, chic type je t'ai aimée, quand nous avons commencé" (C 219). By revealing her "true" feelings, Léa has removed her masks, and without her multiple roles, she can no longer fulfill the expectations of an audience that anticipates familiar lines. Thus, with the actress unmasked, previously silent lines, the lines of age, now

make themselves seen and heard. Her well rehearsed trick of diverting Chéri's eyes from her aging body no longer works, and she realizes that Chéri is looking at and hearing her now as an old woman: "'Tu arrives ici, et tu trouves une vieille femme'" (C 186).

In evoking "the great sacrifices, the follies of passion pushed to the extreme of sacrificing honor and life...," (Moses 183), Deraismes refers to bourgeois men and the scandals that they cause in pursuing their desire within the courtesan sphere. With the imposition of unifying elements upon her courtesan <u>milieu</u>, Léa commits a similarly scandalous act. The passionate folly of "truthfulness" pushes Léa to the extreme of sacrificing her honor as a successful courtesan and her continuing youthfulness as well. In the process, Léa disregards the codes of her "naturally" duplicitous <u>milieu</u> and replaces her equi-vocal roles with the uni-vocality of an aging woman who wants truthfully to love. This desire to love without deceit would seem "natural" for women within the bourgeois sphere, yet such a desire proves to be "unnatural," hence "scandalous" for the courtesan. While the detective story model boldly guarantees narrative unity through a final gesture of closure, so Léa's character assumes momentarily a decidable, single role. However, this reunification of her multiple characters, this final twisting together of textual "splitting,"

proves, like the fine print of the detective contract, to be too shocking for an already scandalous text to maintain. Just as the "unification" of the marriage and honeymoon ceremonies remains virtually repressed within the text, this final scandalous attempt to reunify textual "splitting" undergoes similar repression -- in this case, as a final "re-splitting" that reinstates duplicity within the courtesan milieu. For, as Léa watches Chéri walk across her courtyard for the last time, she still hopes to escape the horrible consequences of abandonment and aging that her gesture toward reunification has caused. She wishes for Chéri's return, and with it, the possibility of resuming her familiar roles, a wish equivocally granted as the narrative re-establishes duplicity through the figures of Léa and her mirror image. As Léa waves her arms in excitement when Chéri appears to hesitate in the courtyard, the mirror reflects "une vieille femme haletante qui répéta, dans le miroir oblong, son geste, et Léa se demanda ce qu'elle pouvait avoir de commun avec cette folle" (C 190, emphasis added).

Helena Michie's distinction between the mirror reflection as "an image of the body (vanity/surface)" and as "an attempt to move beyond the body (reflection/ contemplation)" (8) underscores the tension between Léa's equi-vocal reflections that vacillate between a "surface" of definitive interpretation and "contemplative" or

multiple interpretations. This tension between mirror interpretations propels Léa's image into an endlessly reflecting loop between the single, "sane" interpretation of a hermeneutic code tending toward a readerly closure on the one hand, and on the other, an "insanely" excessive semiotic code whose circulation moves beyond closure's boundaries. The "unified" Léa strains to read closure in a surface reflection, desperately seeking the "common" element that would allow her to interpret her mirror image, to replace the duplicity of insane contemplation with sanity's supposedly unified surface.[14] Yet Léa's mental gesture toward commonality through self interrogation ("se demander"), which is both a reflexive and reflective verb, only replicates the mirror's endlessly reflecting loop, effectively perpetuating her reflection en abyme. What she has "in common" with the mirror image is, in fact, its equivocal representation. Between her desire for commonality (reunification, closure) and her inability to attain it in an unrecognizable image which, ironically, repeats her every gesture, there emerges an ultimate scandal, an equi-vocal outburst between a surface image and its multiple reflections, mirror images which, like the courtesan and bourgeois social codes for Belle Epoque women, have everything and nothing in common.

NOTES

[1] I am aware that I have excluded both aristocratic and working class women and men from consideration in this chapter. In doing so, I am reflecting both Colette's text in which Léa's lovers are wealthy bourgeois as well as the historical documentation which indicates that the most successful courtesans of the Belle Epoque came from the bourgeoisie. See Guilleminault 160-193 and Corbin 200-201.

[2] For historical information concerning social codes, I have relied most specifically on Guilleminault, Moses, Weber and Zeldin. In transposing the dynamics of these historically grounded social codes onto the text, I risk oversimplifying the complex historical issues concerning courtesan and bourgeois life between 1885 and 1914 (the dates proposed by Roger Shattuck to encompass the Belle Epoque). I intend that this chapter be only lightly grounded in the historical since my main interest here is literary, or more specifically, an investigation of the textual effects that these codes produce. However, I do not wish to imply that a neat distinction exists between history and literature. For a discussion of the connection between poetics and the production of historical texts, see White 1-42.

[3] I use the concept of scandal developed by Ross

Chambers in his seminar "Scandals of Mediation."

[4] Sarde notes the difference in reception of Chéri between French women and men (389-390), and also describes the pressures that patriarchal systems exerted upon women at the beginning of the twentieth century (164).

[5] As Sarde notes, Constant treats a similar love affair between an older woman and a younger man in Adolphe. However, while Chéri continues to desire Léa, much of Constant's novel concerns Adolphe's desire to discontinue his liaison with Ellénore, a liaison that ends "satisfactorily" with Ellénore's death (390).

[6] All references to Chéri are abbreviated C in the text.

[7] Belsey extends the idea of neat closure that the detective story provides to nineteenth-century classic realism in general in order to illustrate the extent to which the author's and reader's shared consensus about a text illustrates their mutual position within ideology. Belsey contends that it is ideology that represses the problematic relationship between subjectivity and language (56-84).

[8] I thank Ross Chambers for the observation that the courtesan inhabits a milieu équivoque from a bourgeois point of view.

[9] Mari Ward McCarty treats similar themes of appearance and theatricality. Although we make similar

observations regarding specific passages, I seek to illustrate the dynamics of duplicity while McCarty develops Colette's theatricality as an "entirely new understanding of the process of literature" (133). I will continue to cite McCarty when our interpretation of textual elements, albeit supporting different arguments, seem to coincide.

[10] The term "splitting" has been used to describe a variety of effects. Broden describes "splitting" as a set of mirror images in which the character cannot recognize her reflection (21). From a psychoanalytic perspective Jessica Benjamin explains the "narrow, technical use as well as a broader metapsychological and metaphoric meaning" which stem from the idea that splitting is "a defense against aggression, an effort to protect the 'good' object by splitting off its 'bad' aspects that have incurred aggression" (63). Suleiman extends this psychoanalytic notion of splitting to the experience of writing mothers.

[11] At times, I will intervene on the level of the signifier by transforming "equivocal" and "equivocations" into "equi-vocal" and "equi-vocations." These hyphenated versions are meant to build on the sense of ambiguity and indeterminacy suggested by the French "équivoque" by adding other layers of signification. Thus, the adjective "equi-vocal" suggests "equally vocal" elements or elements

that sustain an "equal voice" while the newly formed expression "equi-vocations" implies "vocations of equal importance."

[12] In La Volonté du savoir, Foucault argues that while it is generally thought that bourgeois power structures have repressed knowledge of sexuality, power works in different and diffuse ways (67). It is in exploring every aspect of sexual behavior that these diffuse sites of power have succeeded in containing sexuality within limited forms of sexual pleasure, a limiting effect that allows bourgeois power structures to maintain control over pleasure. Thus, the intolerance that I allude to in this chapter functions as a mechanism by which sexual pleasure deemed to be exterior to bourgeois sites of power is ultimately coded and controlled.

[13] McCarty (130) also cites this quotation to signal a moment when Léa drops her role-playing.

[14] Robert Cottrell articulates the "surface" interpretation of the final mirror scene: "As she glances in the mirror, her heart sinking, she sees the image of a fat, old woman -- an image which she must now accept as a faithful reflection of herself" (92).

CHAPTER II

Timely Considerations: Temporality and Gender in La Fin de Chéri

> ...il oublia pendant
> plusieurs jours de consulter
> inutilement son
> bracelet-montre, ainsi qu'il
> faisait à l'approche du
> crépuscule.
> -- Colette, La Fin de Chéri

In Chapter I, a close reading demonstrated ways in which the text, Chéri, destabilizes dominant cultural codes, be they the social codes governing bourgeois women and demi-mondaines during the Belle Epoque or the reading codes that privilege a hermeneutic closure. In the present chapter, I will focus on destabilization from a different perspective by considering the effects of the complex temporal structure in La Fin de Chéri (1926) on what feminist narratologists have identified as male-biased theories of narratology.[1] The development of narratological approaches has provided valuable insights into the form, function and implications of narrative temporality in the novel. Unlike the linear construction

of time as an irreversibly forward-moving flow, narrative temporality in fiction, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan suggests, "can be defined as the relations of chronology between story and text" (44).[2] To begin this temporal analysis, I will first examine temporal order on what Susan Suleiman, in her table of textual components, calls the "level of story" (i.e. Suleiman's "events" or "the sequences of actions") and then engage the "level of discourse" (i.e. "temporal organization") by probing the limits of the concept of analepsis proposed by Gérard Genette. Subsequently, I will propose an expansion of this concept to include what I will call "instances of reflection." Finally, I will extend this expanded analeptic model to Colette's La Fin de Chéri in order to suggest that this wider approach destabilizes the notion of "activity" in plot that grounds conventional narratology.

In La Fin de Chéri, the first sentences foreground the novel's complex temporal organization:

> Chéri referma derrière lui la grille du petit jardin et huma l'air nocturne: "Ah! il fait bon..." Il se reprit aussitôt: "Non, il ne fait pas bon." (FC 29)[3]

In this opening scene, Chéri oscillates between a positive and negative evaluation of le temps, a vacillation between "fair" ("bon") and "foul" ("pas bon"). This indeterminate climate in which the novel begins also characterizes the novel's global structure. For the

qualifiers "fair" and "foul" extend beyond their specific climatic meanings. As I will show, while Chéri runs afoul of linear temporality in his attempt to turn from his gloomy present to a brighter past, the female characters' successful engagement with the postwar narrative present disturbs Chéri's sense of fair play and finally renders impossible his assimilation into the present.

1. Temporal Vacillations

In order to locate and discuss temporal indicators within a contextual framework, I will provide a brief overview of the novel. In La Fin de Chéri, Chéri has returned to his Parisian surroundings in the summer of 1919 after having fought for four years in the army. Chéri's Parisian circle has changed substantially as courtesan codes that privileged physicality and sensuality have been replaced by the bourgeois codes of routine work and profit. During the war years, the women in Chéri's life have taken jobs in the public sector. Chéri finds his wife, his mother, and many of their courtesan friends engaged in hospital administration, the stock market, and a variety of more questionable speculative activities as well. Disgusted at the active role these women have taken in public life, Chéri attempts an escape from their industrious present by searching for

his prewar past. His first attempt, a visit to his prewar lover, Léa, proves detrimental since the shock of seeing this former beauty as a fat, gray-haired woman intensifies his refusal to accept the passage of time. Henceforth, the novel focuses on his determined search for the beautiful Léa and the sensual prewar world that he had known. His regression into a dream-like past is made possible through the intervention/mediation of another aging courtesan, La Copine. Chéri takes refuge from the present in La Copine's apartment with its wall of photographs of their shared prewar world. He listens as La Copine repeatedly recounts the old stories of courtesan triumphs. When La Copine departs suddenly for her mother's funeral, Chéri finds himself dangerously alone before the wall of Léa's eyes. Overwhelmed, Chéri shoots himself.

With this brief summary, I will begin to explore the novel's temporal structure that reveals itself both through key descriptions of Chéri's non-traditional treatment of time as well as through the novel's temporal progression.[4] We have already seen Chéri's indecision regarding le temps as weather. Shortly after this indecisive opening statement, as the almost thirty-year-old Chéri descends the stairs into the hall of his sumptuous home, he manifests a similar indecisiveness regarding "le temps" as time:

Il cherchait et redoutait cette glace, qu'une

> porte-fenêtre trouble et bleue, assombrie encore par les feuillages du jardin, éclairait en face. Un choc léger arrêtait Chéri, chaque fois, contre son image. Il ne comprenait pas pourquoi cette image n'était pas exactement l'image d'un jeune homme de vingt-quatre ans. Il ne discernait pas non plus les points précis où le temps, par touches imperceptibles, marque sur un beau visage l'heure de la perfection, puis, l'heure d'une beauté plus évidente qui annonce déjà la majesté d'un déclin. (FC 44-45)

This passage reveals that, on a recurring basis, Chéri is unable or unwilling in his bewilderment to make any connection between the face he observes in the mirror and the fixed image of himself at age twenty-four.[5] In his refusal, he rejects both mental and mirror reflections, seeking retrospection instead. The lack of correspondence between his expectation and the actual image that he perceives in the mirror stems from his inability to situate the precise loci of time's imperceptible act of marking. This inability, this lack of skill, produces the shock ("un choc léger") between conflicting images: one, fixed in a clear and vital past time; the other, pointing presently toward decline. Chéri's unwillingness to acknowledge the traditional linear flow from vitality to decline creates a constant vacillation between past and present, between retrospection and reflection in which

time as a uni-directional, linear flow is ultimately disrupted. It is not surprising, then, that the undecidable vacillation with the mirror image affects Chéri's capacity to function in the narrative present.[6]

Shifting the focus from the character Chéri to the temporal structure of the text reveals temporal vacillations that ultimately prove to be undecidable. An examination of the temporal indicators in the seven sections of the novel reveals that sections 1 and 2 constitute a reasonably definite 3-week period beginning at midnight on a day in late June, continuing with elliptical jumps that are generally calculable, through a day in mid-July (section 1), and ending several hours after the 6 PM visit to Léa as Chéri emerges from her building into the pink evening light (section 2). On the level of story, a series of three shocks wrenches Chéri from this relatively stable time structure, and with each shock, Chéri becomes increasingly aware of his own inability to function in a narrative present to which his childhood friend, Desmond, and the female characters, Edmée, Léa, and Charlotte, have successfully adapted. For Chéri, the initial "choc léger," cited in the aforementioned mirror scene, is followed toward the end of section 1 by a second shock that Chéri receives as he calculates the length of time that has elapsed since he has last seen Léa. He estimates that it has been only one

year since their last good-bye, but then realizes that he has inadvertently forgotten to include the war years. A rather similar incident illustrates that Chéri's complicated approach to linear time stands in sharp contrast to the temporal notions of female characters: when Edmée reminds Chéri that they have been married for seven years, Chéri promptly revises the number to two, limiting the years of their marriage to 1913 and 1919, and thereby suspending their official status of husband and wife for the duration of the war. Unlike Chéri who re-orders events through an evaluative system that disrupts linear time, Edmée views time as an unproblematic, linear flow. Since the number of years during which they have been married remains an unresolved point between them, this irresolution circulates, like the lost war years of Chéri's previous calculation, as a site of vacillation within the text.

The third shock is not "léger" for it is, in effect, the shock that Chéri receives upon seeing the corpulent Léa. Having been introduced into a room in which two women are talking, Chéri wonders to himself where Léa could be just as "la dame au poil gris se retourna, et Chéri reçut en plein visage le choc de ses yeux bleus" (FC 86). And while Chéri inwardly cries foul, rejecting Léa's corpulence as he searches her body for signs of the woman he had known, Léa demonstrates her capacity to live in the

narrative present as she explains: "'J'aime bien mon passé. J'aime bien mon présent'" (FC 91). Unable to locate any "points précis" as he surveys Léa's body in desperation and disbelief, Chéri succumbs to this final, substantial shock by further releasing his grasp on the narrative present. The effect of the shocks reduces his perception from a relative awareness of his conflict between past and present to their manifestations in oneiric fragments. As Chéri leaves Léa's apartment:

> Il y eut encore entre eux, pendant la retraite de Chéri, quelques paroles, le bruit d'un meuble heurté, un pan de paroles, un pan de lumière, bleue par contraste, que versa une fenêtre ouverte sur la cour, une grande main bossuée de bagues qui se leva à la hauteur des lèvres de Chéri, un rire de Léa, qui s'arrêta à mi-chemin de sa gamme habituelle ainsi qu'un jet d'eau coupé dont la cime, privée soudain de sa tige, retombe en perles espacées... L'escalier passa sous les pieds de Chéri ainsi que le pont qui soude deux songes, et il retrouva la rue Raynouard qu'il ne connaissait pas. (FC 106)

A two-week ellipsis functions as the bridge between these foregrounding vacillations (sections 1 and 2) and the temporal destabilization that follows. Section 3 suggests a dream-like state as Chéri, seated in a café

that he has frequented since his childhood, pulls his hand through his hair in a particular way that triggers the aural memory of multiple female voices that had once surrounded him there. The unusual triple repetition of the indicator, "depuis quinze jours," reinforces the crossing into a dream-like temporal dynamic through the emphasis on the iterative quality of this two week duration. Later, in the same section, as Chéri puts La Copine into a taxi after their unexpected meeting in the café, he again experiences disorientation: "Il crut, comme on le croit en songe, qu'il allait s'éveiller chez lui, parmi les jardins arrosés tous les soirs, l'odeur du chèvrefeuille d'Espagne et les cris des oiseaux, contre la hanche à peine renflée de sa jeune femme..." (FC 117). After two indefinite ellipses that frame the period of "l'été parisien" (section 4), the following section begins, as did section 3, with a disoriented Chéri. He wonders where he is and how he arrived there: "Il se trouva dehors, et vêtu pour la rue, sans presque avoir su qu'il revêtait un imperméable léger, coiffait d'un chapeau mou" (FC 137).

Finally, after another indefinite ellipsis, the temporal structure proves undecidable in sections 6 and 7. For, in section 6 not only does the narrative progress from descriptions of disorientation to the recounting of a dream that the impersonal narration describes as "indéchiffrable" (FC 169), in section 7 the temporal

indicators themselves resist analysis. In the crucial few pages preceding Chéri's suicide, two contradictory time indicators occur: the narrative states that Chéri "porta ainsi jusqu'aux derniers jours d'octobre son paisible et bureaucratique désespoir" (FC 164). Yet this temporal indicator is almost immediately contradicted by another: "Un après-midi de septembre ..." (FC 166), followed quickly by an additional temporal marker, the opening sentence of the final scene: "Il sortit, le matin suivant..." (FC 169). Chéri cannot continue in desperation through the last days of October if he commits suicide on the day following a September afternoon. At the point of greatest narrative tension, then, the temporal indicators jar into an endless, undecidable vacillation between two points in time.[7] It is not only Chéri, but also the reader who cannot locate "les points précis" that distinguish vitality from decline, or in this case, summer (September) from fall (October). Such a crucial circulation of these "points précis" in the last pages of the text constitutes a significant narrative destabilization.

Taking this September/October vacillation into account, the story stretches across one summer season and possibly into autumn. This seasonal time span corresponds figuratively to Chéri's youth and, with the fall season, his impending decline as well. Such seasonal considerations return me to Chéri's initial evaluation of

"fair" and "foul" weather. As in the first scene of the novel, this summer/fall metaphor repeats the text's initial gesture as it oscillates between summer's "fair" weather and the onset of autumn's "foulness." Thus, while the correspondence between seasons of the year and the seasons of a life would seem to function in La Fin de Chéri as a focal analogy, the September/October vacillation that occurs at the height of narrative tension undermines this traditional narrative device as well.

2. Analeptic Expansion

While the indicators that disturb "les points précis" in the novel's temporal organization constitute vacillating and ultimately undecidable sites in La Fin de Chéri, a consideration of the description and functioning of past time reveals further destabilizing devices as well. It is likely that the reader associates past time with a work contemporary to La Fin de Chéri, Proust's voluminous A la recherche du temps perdu. In Figures III, where he focuses on Proust's texts as a privileged temporal exemplar, Genette schematizes retrospection through the device he calls "analepsis" as part of his concept of "temporal organization." Genette defines analepsis as "toute évocation après coup d'un événement antérieur au point de l'histoire où l'on se trouve" (Figures III 82), and Genette continues his definition by

locating analepses on a narrative level that remains temporally outside or secondary to the temporal level of the story, the "récit premier":

> Toute anachronie [limited for my purposes to the study of analepsis] constitue par rapport au récit dans lequel elle s'insère -- sur lequel elle se greffe -- un récit temporellement second, subordonné au premier dans cette sorte de syntaxe narrative que nous avons rencontrée dès l'analyse . . . Nous appellerons désormais "récit premier" le niveau temporel de récit par rapport auquel une anachronie se définit comme telle." (Figures III 90)

Although Genette's definition and location of analepsis apply to approximately one-third of the analepses in La Fin de Chéri (analepses that recount past events through descriptive passages introduced by clear temporal indicators), the remaining two-thirds do not conform completely to Genette's definition. These analepses oscillate between narrative past and present through varying combinations of dialogue and description. For example, when Chéri asks La Copine to explain her earlier reference to mohair, she responds:

> -- Le mohair, c'était un genre alpaga, en plus tombant, tu vois? Léa craignait le linon en été, elle prétendait que c'était bon pour le linge de corps et

> les mouchoirs... Elle avait du linge de reine, tu t'en rappelles, et au moment de cette photo-là... oui, la belle aux grandes jambes... on n'était pas au linge plat comme aujourd'hui. C'était des ruchés et des ruchés, une écume, une neige, et des pantalons, mon petit, à vous donner le vertige, les côtés en chantilly blanc, le milieu en chantilly noir, tu vois l'effet!... Tu le vois? (FC 163)

In this passage, La Copine grants Chéri access to the past through her verbal recollections inspired by a particular photograph from among the many that cover her wall. La Copine describes the past for Chéri, yet her dialogue remains in the present, that is, as an integral part of what Genette names the "récit premier." In fact, since the transfer of information from La Copine to Chéri occurs within the temporally linear progression of this "first narrative," La Copine's dialogue regarding the picture that she and Chéri contemplate participates in the present and the past simultaneously.

This disparity between analeptic monologue belonging to the first narrative and Genette's assertion that analeptic passages be relegated to a "secondary" narrative level, occurs as well in other "analepses" in La Fin de Chéri through varied textual strategies. For example, in some cases, the past is evoked through a character's thoughts in the present, and at other moments, through the

quoted or paraphrased words of another character, a combination that the following passage demonstrates. As Chéri returns home late one evening, he notices a cat that he does not recognize in his front hall:

> Le chat le toisa sans reculer d'une manière insultante, et Chéri se souvint qu'aucune bête, chien, cheval ou chat, ne lui avait accordé de sympathie. Il entendit, par-delà quinze années, la voix éraillée d'Aldonza, qui prophétisait: "Ceux que les bêtes n'aiment pas, c'est des maudits!" (FC 118)

In short, in La Fin de Chéri, numerous evocations of the past, either through the presence of voices that belong to the "récit premier" or photographs that represent past time while figuring into the narrative present, contradict Genette's concept of analepses in that they refer to the past while remaining part of the "récit premier." I shall henceforth refer to these "non-compliant" analeptic forms as "instances of reflection," a term that insists on a "passive" mental process ("reflection") rather than an actual event.

I make the distinction between mental and physical processes because "instances of reflection" not only contradict Genette's retrospective concept of analepsis by figuring into the "récit premier," these "instances" further contradict Genette's concept in that they do not necessarily constitute analeptic "events" in the manner

that both Genette and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan imply. Recalling that Genette defines analepsis in part as "toute évocation après coup d'un <u>événement</u> antérieur au point de l'histoire où on se trouve" (emphasis added), I emphasize Genette's privileging of "events" over non-events such as thoughts:

> le récit ramène toujours les pensées soit à des discours, soit à des événements; il ne fait pas place à un troisième terme, et encore une fois ce manque de nuances, qui est son fait et non le mien, tient à sa propre nature verbale. Le récit, qui raconte des histoires, n'a affaire qu'à des événements; certains de ces événements sont verbaux; alors, exceptionnellement, il lui arrive, pour changer un peu, de les <u>reproduire</u>." (Nouveau discours du récit 43)

By contrast, Rimmon-Kenan briefly recognizes "instances of reflection" as a possibility if only in order to dismiss the placement of any emphasis on such non-events. In glossing Genette's theory, Rimmon-Kenan argues that past "events" recounted by characters, by whatever means, only constitute the "act of remembering" and not an actual analepsis. Thus she concludes that an "act of remembering" "will probably appear twice: once as an <u>occurrence</u> in the past . . . and once as a part of the present act of remembering, fearing or hoping" (51, emphasis added). In

other words, because the "act of remembering" would be a repetition of an actual "occurrence" in the story, Rimmon-Kenan excludes it from the analeptic category. Like Genette, then, Rimmon-Kenan emphasizes active "occurrences" over less active alternatives.

I have emphasized these terms ("occurrence" and "event") in order to examine more closely the ways in which narratological discourse seems to exclude a text such as La Fin de Chéri from its "universal" definitions. In La Fin de Chéri, for example, "instances of reflection" do not function in the same way as Rimmon-Kenan's "acts of remembering" in that the "instances of reflection" in La Fin de Chéri are not necessarily repeated as actual "occurrences" even if La Fin de Chéri and Chéri are considered together. For while La Copine remembers Léa's undergarments in detail, the years during which Léa wore these confections precede both novels and are not depicted as actual "occurrences" in either. In this case, La Copine's "instance of reflection," while no doubt a "present act of remembering" (Rimmon-Kenan 51), does not comply completely with Rimmon-Kenan's definition since the "instance of reflection" appears narratively but once, thus remaining the sole evocation of Rimmon-Kennan's "occurrence" or Genette's "event."

Furthermore, while Rimmon-Kenan dismisses "acts of remembering" from the definition of analepsis by

considering them passive elements that must ultimately be reinforced by "occurrences," Genette further schematizes analepses as "external" and "internal," a schematization that renders virtually impossible any attempt to include the aforementioned sample "instance of reflection." Genette defines "external" analepsis as "cette analepse dont toute l'amplitude reste extérieure à celle du récit premier" (Figures III 90), and contends that "external" analepses, "du seul fait qu'elles sont externes, ne risquent à aucun moment d'interférer avec le récit premier, qu'elles ont seulement pour fonction de compléter en éclairant le lecteur sur tel ou tel 'antécédent'" (Figures III 91). Taking as our example La Copine's description of Léa and her undergarments, one might argue that this "instance of reflection" falls into Genette's category of "external" analepsis in that it describes a past moment prior to the beginning of the first narrative. However, having already established that this "instance of reflection" functions as an integral part of the first narrative by dint of its insertion as dialogue, this sample clashes with the second part of Genette's definition (i.e. external analepses "ne risquent à aucun moment d'interférer avec le récit premier..."). Moreover, while this sample "instance of reflection" escapes definitive definition as "external," its "internal" properties encounter similar contradictions. For while La

Copine's "instance of reflection" does not meet Genette's temporal criteria for an "internal" analepsis (that is, an analepsis that occurs after the "récit premier" begins, Figures III 90), I will show that this "instance of reflection" does possess the power of recall inherent to "internal" analepsis, a power which confers "rétroactivement à l'épisode passé un sens qu'il n'avait pas encore en son temps" (Genette, Figures III 96).[8]

Both Genette and Rimmon-Kenan choose their narratological terms from within the active/passive and, by extension, male/female dyad in which "event" or "occurrence" suggests masculine activity. If, as Wallace Martin suggests, Aristotle's Poetics serves as the sourcebook for traditional narratological study (Recent Theories 81), then the privileging of masculine activity in much current narratology comes as no surprise. It is well known that in his discussion of tragedy, Aristotle defines plot as a "combination of events" (Poetics 50) and tragedy itself not as an "imitation of men but of action and of life" (51). According to Martin, this dynamic masculine concept of activity begins to find its modern expression in Propp who ascertained that "verbs and actions [are] more structurally significant than nouns and characters" (93). Susan S. Lanser expands upon Martin's observations by calling attention to the gender bias of other critics such as Genette, Greimas, Iser, Barthes and

Levi-Strauss who, by relying almost exclusively on texts written by men, have not taken gender into account in their work (343). Susan Winnett eloquently addresses narratology's gender bias in a similar way by challenging the masculine model of pleasure (i.e. "tumescence," "significant discharge," and "detumescence") that she finds in Peter Brook's Reading for the Plot.[9] Similar insights concerning the male bias in narratology have prompted Lanser to remark that "perhaps narratology has been mistaken in trying to arrive at a single definition and description of plot," and to express her dissatisfaction with the "notion of plot" which "again and again" forces scholars of women's writing to speak in terms of the "plotless" (357).

The disparity that I have demonstrated thus far between "instances of reflection" in La Fin de Chéri and the definition of analepses provided by Genette and Rimmon-Kenan, furthers the argument that gender bias inhabits conventional narratological systems. I contend that the exclusion of elements such as "instances of reflections" from the analeptic category substantially limits the appreciation, in narratological terms, of texts with the temporal complexity of La Fin de Chéri. For it is clear that a definition of plot based on active "occurrences" or "events" unnecessarily excludes significant elements from the plot structure, specifically

in a novel such as La Fin de Chéri, in which narrative strategies do not necessarily conform to a dynamic masculine model of plot and its unfolding. These "instances of reflection" demonstrate the extent to which La Fin de Chéri resists traditional narratological models. Moreover, it is the articulation of "instances of reflection" that moves Chéri to recollect his past and to begin his temporal revisions.[10]

3. Fatal Re-Visions

By including both "instances of reflection" and conventional analepses in an overview of retrospective activity in La Fin de Chéri, I can make some quantitative observations.[11] Comparing the ratio of analepses to the page length of each section reveals that the rate of analeptic activity corresponds to a textual and thematic intensification of desire for the past. Specifically, in section 1, the narrative establishes a certain level of vacillation between past and present which represents Chéri's grasp, tenuous as it may be, of his present surroundings. In section 7, a similar level of analeptic vacillation is re-established as Chéri returns to a semblance of narrative present in order to reject it definitively. While section 2 contains the least analeptic action as the narrative focuses on Léa in her present form, the acceleration of analeptic activity in

sections 3, 4, 5, and 6 suggests an intensification of Chéri's longing for the past.

I contend that the momentum for this acceleration in sections 3, 4, 5, and 6 builds through the revisionary power of recall, a power that Genette reserves exclusively for "internal" analepses, yet that I locate alternatively in "instances of reflection." For, in La Fin de Chéri, it is not Chéri's original vision of his past self that leads him to suicide, but the tension resulting from the intolerable vacillation between this original vision and the re-vision which the power of recall provides through "instances of reflection" that are mediated quite often by the female characters. While Chéri cherishes an original vision of himself as a superior and unique being who commands a position of central importance in the lives of the women who surround him, the female characters offer him their conflicting, decentralizing perspectives. Thus, just as traditional gender-biased narratology has "been mistaken at trying to arrive at one single definition and description of plot" (Lanser 357), so Chéri demonstrates an equal inflexibility. His obsession with retrospection and his aggressive, negative reception of the alternative images of himself that female characters provide produce a tension between masculine and feminine perspectives. In her critique of male-biased narratological theory, Winnett contrasts male and female physiological models of

tumescence and detumescence thereby suggesting a similar tension. Winnett equates the male sexual model with a self-containment which, at times, may be equated with retrospection, and the female sexual model with child-bearing activities that preclude self-containment and require a prospective outlook instead.

Winnett bases her approach on the differing and still unexplored dynamics of a female sexual model as compared to the male model of "tumescence" and "detumescence" stating that "female experience does indeed include two highly representable instances of 'tumescence and detumescence'. . . birth and breast feeding" (509). She maintains that because birth and breast feeding "do not culminate in a quiescence that can bearably be conceptualized as a simulacrum of death, they neither need nor can confer on themselves the kind of retrospective significance attained by analogy with the pleasure principle" (509). Moreover, Winnett suggests that "as sense-making operations, both are radically <u>pro</u>spective . . . Most important for our narratological purposes, however, both childbirth and breast feeding force us to think forward rather than backward; whatever finality birth possesses as a physical experience pales in comparison with the exciting, frightening sense of the beginning of a new life" (509, emphasis in original). Winnett thus argues that the male sexual model, revealed

in narrative as the oedipal plot, still maintains its privilege in the field of narratology while a narratological model based on female instances of tumescence and detumescence might reveal a very different underlying structural dynamic.[12]

It is striking to observe the extent to which Winnett's theory resounds on the level of story in La Fin de Chéri. From a temporal perspective, Winnett's concept of male retrospection and female prospection corresponds to the novel's main characters in that the male character, Chéri, engages in retrospection and a fascination with death while the female characters, Léa, Charlotte, and Edmée, share a prospective outlook.[13] Like other male characters in Winnett's analysis, Chéri indulges in "the retrospective mode of 'male' sense-making" (510). By contrast, as Robert Cottrell notes, the female characters possess "a limitless capacity to adapt and adjust" (92). Unwilling to participate in the prospective views of the female characters who care about him, Chéri treats them instead with abruptness and contempt as he strives through them to maintain the unique retrospective position of importance and centrality that he enjoyed before the war. For example, Chéri's cruel comments are meant to punish Léa for her present corpulent joviality and her interest in living. Léa reacts by recognizing Chéri's disturbed state, by offering a diagnosis and by suggesting a cure

for his ills. Yet Chéri rejects any suggestion that would fortify his body and, in doing so, infer a commitment to living in the narrative present. Like Léa, Chéri's mother, Charlotte, an avid investor in stock market futures, intervenes on behalf of Chéri's survival through her encouragement to rekindle his interest in life by taking a lover, a suggestion that Chéri counters with a vehement criticism of her business affairs. Even Chéri's neglected wife, Edmée, whose daily hospital work assures a future for severely wounded soldiers, cares for him when he hits his head as he falls into a faint. Thus, while Chéri expends his energy in an attempt to reject the postwar incarnations of these women, the female characters deliberately express their care and explicitly attempt to include Chéri in their present and future. Moreover, not only does the opposition between Chéri's obsession with retrospection and the willingness of Léa, Charlotte and Edmée to engage in prospection support Winnett's temporal argument, but the power of recall inherent in "instances of reflection" paradoxically supports Winnett's "feminine" or "prospective" model as well in that, through the revisionary process, these "instances of reflection" render new interpretations possible.

These new interpretations begin to take shape as "instances of reflection," provided for the most part by

La Copine, weaken the base upon which Chéri has built his self-image. As Chéri contemptuously orders La Copine to describe certain photographs, she gladly complies, offering her stories as an entertainment and a comfort to them both. Yet while La Copine offers to share the past, Chéri seeks only the personal "arousal" that the tension inherent in "instances of reflection" incites. This personal strategy of "tumescence" proves to be Chéri's undoing: hearing La Copine's description of the frilly black and white underwear that Léa wore long before she took him as a lover, Chéri does not lament the passing of a particular fashion, as does La Copine, but rather focuses on his place (or lack thereof) within the story. As he begins to understand the significance of his absence from this scenario, Chéri reacts with jealousy:

> "Ecoeurant, pensait Chéri. Ecoeurant. Le milieu en chantilly noir. Une femme ne met pas des milieux en chantilly noir pour elle seule. Elle portait ça devant qui? pour qui?"
>
> Il revoyait le geste de Léa quand il entrait dans la salle de bains ou dans le boudoir, le geste furtif de la gandourah recroisée. Il revoyait la chaste confiance du corps rosé, nu dans la baignoire, rassuré par l'eau laiteuse qu'une essence troublait...
>
> "Mais pour d'autres, des pantalons en chantilly..." (FC 163-164)

During his seven years with Léa, Chéri had been so certain of his centrality that, although he knew some of her previous lovers as a boy, he never considered the parts they played in Léa's life:

> Portraits, lettres, récits tombés de la seule bouche qui eût été véridique, rien n'avait franchi, jamais, l'étroit éden où vivaient ensemble Léa et Chéri, pendant des années. Presque rien de Chéri ne datait d'avant Léa, -- comment se fût-il soucié de ce qui avant lui, mûri, chagriné ou enrichi son amie? (FC 151)

This tension between Chéri's original vision of centrality and the de-centering re-visions that "instances of reflection" provoke in him destabilizes both Chéri's present and past self-images. Thus, as La Copine reels off the names of Léa's other lovers with joyous nonchalance, Chéri vacillates between his innocuous childhood memories of the men who previously occupied Léa's life and his current re-evaluation of these men in light of La Copine's "instances of reflection." While attempting to sustain his uniqueness and centrality in Léa's life, Cheri must nevertheless recognize a certain shrinkage of this engorged image since, as he learns inadvertently from La Copine, he is simply the last in a long line of young men whom Léa had known. As La Copine points to a picture of one of Léa's former lovers, she

explains to Chéri in her courtesan vocabulary: "Naturellement, tu ne peux guère le reconnaître, il date de deux tours avant toi." Chéri responds: "Deux quoi?" (FC 148). The jarring realization that he actually knows so little about Léa and that, in any case, he figures into her courtesan life as an impersonal slot, a "tour," forces him to admit to the possibility of additional re-visions and further displacement from the cherished central position which a male model of sexual pleasure would seem to guarantee.

The vacillations between Chéri's original retrospective vision and his subsequent re-visions culminate in the last scenes of the novel as the power of recall inherent in "instances of reflection" ultimately deflates his self-image. In the last pages of the novel, Chéri can no longer continue to see himself as Léa's unique source of pleasure. Instead, he envisions himself in an intolerable re-vision that shatters his narcissistic centrality. As part of a larger group, as one man among many, Chéri revises his memory of life with Léa: "Je croyais qu'elle était à moi, et je ne m'apercevais pas que j'étais seulement un de ses amants" (FC 165). In the final scene, as Chéri searches among the Léa photographs on La Copine's wall, he experiences the destabilizing vacillation between his original vision of the past that he seeks in the photographs, and the decentralizing

re-visions that these photographs ultimately provide. Unable to relinquish his original vision and fully aware of the multiple re-visions that "instances of reflection" have caused, Chéri's scrutiny of the photographs produces a fully circulating confusion of images. For while he finds in them his original male-centered vision of a Léa for whom he is unique and central, of a Léa whose myriad photographed eyes "semblaient s'occuper de lui" (FC 174), he immediately perceives in these same photographs an undesirable "feminine" re-vision that projects him from past to present, "Mais ce n'est qu'un air qu'elles [the photographs] ont, je le sais bien" (FC 174). Thus, Chéri vacillates between a cherished vision that a jarring and brutal war has rendered forever "hors de ce temps-ci" (FC 174) and inevitable re-visions that ultimately return him to the narrative present and the prospective female characters that function pleasurably within it. Faced with this intolerable vacillation, Chéri performs the ultimate act of "significant discharge" as posited by Winnett's male pleasure model, in one final and abruptly triggered release.

By examining temporality in La Fin de Chéri both from the perspective of the novel's temporal framework and from the perspective of retrospection, I have revealed the complex treatment of time in the novel, demonstrating the vacillations that destabilize temporality both on the

level of story (e.g. Chéri's problematic perception of time, the undecidable September/October shift) and on the level of discourse ("instances of reflection"). Moreover, by suggesting that "instances of reflection" be considered as a retrospective dynamic, I also enter the current debate that juxtaposes traditional narratological approaches with approaches that feminist narratologists are currently developing, a debate that puts into question the evaluation of Colette's texts as virtually "plotless."[14] Thus, I contend that a narratological system which fails to include the dynamic described here as "instances of reflection" necessarily remains a confining one. Inversely, the inclusion of such a dynamic in the definition of analepsis begins to allow for wider narratological analysis and for a necessary expansion of the conventional notion of plot based on "occurrences" and "events." In short, by insisting on a differing temporal dynamic ("instance of reflection"), this chapter gestures toward one of the goals that Warhol envisions for narratology -- a way to "help describe such differences [in the structures between men's and women's texts] when they occur, which would be the first step in developing a poetics of gendered discourse" (15). Furthermore, by weaving "instances of reflection" into the concept of analepsis and by considering ways in which a different gendering might influence narratological analysis, I begin

to approach the project of an expanded and positive narratology that Lanser proposes not only for women's literature but, more generally, for "scores of twentieth-century texts" (357), a project that may ultimately produce more inclusive and gender-sensitive theories of narratology.

NOTES

[1] In this chapter, I will be relying on recent works by feminist narratologists Robyn Warhol, Susan Lanser and Susan Winnett.

[2] Warhol provides a clarification of such terms as "story" and "text" in her summary of a table of textual components derived by Susan Suleiman from the works of Greimas and Genette. Of particular importance for this chapter is the distinction between the "level of story" and the "level of discourse": "Under 'Discourse' are listed 'Narration' (the functions of the narrator, that is, to tell the story, to signal the organization, to address the narratee, to provide 'testimonials,' and to interpret the story); 'Focalization' (Genette's useful term for describing narrative perspective); and 'Temporal Organization' (the 'order, duration, and frequency' of occurrences in a story). Under 'Story' appear the components one would expect: 'Characters' (both in terms of what they are and what they do in the Story); 'Events' (including the sequences of actions); and 'Context' (including historical, geographical, cultural, and 'local')" (4-5).

[3] References to La Fin de Chéri will be abbreviated FC in the text.

[4] By temporal progression in La Fin de Chéri, I refer

to the novel's division into seven unequal sections, each separated spacially by a blank page and temporally by a definite or indefinite ellipsis. In sections 1 through 6, the time that elapses within each section can be approximately determined by infrequent temporal indicators. Section 1 spans the time between midnight on a day in late June and a morning around July 14. In section 2, several hours pass while sections 3, 4, and 5 each occur during one evening and section 6 in one afternoon. Finally, section 7, as I will show, remains indeterminable. I base this analysis on categories developed in Charles J. Stivale's study of temporality.

[5] There are obvious psychoanalytic connections between Chéri's "misrecognition" in the mirror and Lacan's theory of the Imaginary as described in "Le Stade du miroir" (Ecrits 93-100). More critical attention has been devoted to applying Lacan's theory to the character Renée Néré in La Vagabonde. Joan Hinde Stewart states that "Renée gives form here to the discourse of the other, inevitably recalling Lacan's discussion of the mirror stage: discovery of the self --'identification' -- through the otherness of the image" (46). Chantal Bertrand-Jennings also incorporates Lacan into her discussion of mirrors in La Vagabonde: "Selon Lacan, c'est par la médiation du langage que le 'je' du jeune enfant reprend sa place de sujet après avoir découvert l'image de

son altérité dans le reflet que lui offre le miroir. Dans le récit, le premier langage reconquis par Renée est celui de la danse, qui lui est octroyé, bien entendu, par la maitrise de son propre corps" (24).

[6] Temporal undecidability functions in La Fin de Chéri at points of vacillation between textual positionings "inside" and "outside" of story time as evidenced, for example, by Chéri in the mirror scene. This play between inside and outside constitutes the site of undecidability which Derrida explains, for example, through his description of the term "hymen" in the essay "The Double Session": "The hymen, the consummation of differends, the continuity and confusion of the coitus, merges with what it seems to be derived from: the hymen as protective screen, the jewel box of virginity, the vaginal partition, the fine, invisible veil, which, in front of the hystera, stands between the inside and the outside of woman. . . . It is the hymen that desire dreams of piercing, of bursting, in an act of violence that is (at the same time or somewhere between) love and murder. If either one did take place, there would be no hymen. . . . With all the undecidability of its meaning, the hymen only takes place when it doesn't take place, when nothing really happens, when there is an all-consuming consummation without violence, or violence without blows. . . ." (qtd. in Brunette and Wills 95, emphasis in original).

[7] Given that Colette and her husband, Maurice Goudeket, compiled the first complete edition of her works (published by Flammarion between 1948 and 1950), and that the September/October vacillation was not altered in this or in subsequent editions, I will insist that the temporal oscillation represents more than a simple oversight on the part of the author.

[8] In Chapter V of Figures III, containing a discussion of the metadiegetic narrative [narrative produced by a character within the diegesis], Genette addresses analepsis not from the standpoint of temporality, but from that of voice. For Genette, one function of the metadiegetic narrative is the "explanatory function" which occurs through an "explanatory analepsis" that suggests "une causalité directe entre les événements de la métadiégèse et ceux de la diégèse, qui confère au récit second une fonction explicative. . . . Le plus souvent, la curiosité de l'auditoire intradiégétique [a listener who is part of the diegesis] n'est qu'un prétexte pour répondre à celle du lecteur, comme dans les scènes d'exposition du théatre classique, et le récit métadiégétique une simple variante de l'analepse explicative" (242). While Genette subsequently expands the functions of the metadiegetic narrative (from three in Narrative Discourse to six in Nouveau discours du récit), his definition of "explanatory analepsis" remains

unchanged. Although the brief inclusion of analepsis in his discussion of voice confirms his earlier remarks concerning analepses (Figures III 90-100), he nonetheless does not fill in any of the theoretical gaps that I have already identified.

[9] Winnett states: "The words used to describe the trajectory of male arousal ('awakening, an arousal, the birth of an appetency, ambition, desire or intention' on the one hand and 'significant discharge' on the other) are taken from Peter Brook's influential 'Freud's Masterplot,' which examines the relations between Freud's plotting of the life trajectory in Beyond the Pleasure Principle and the dynamics of beginnings, middles, and ends in traditional narrative. . . . But it seems clear that a narratology based on the oedipal model would have to be profoundly and vulnerably male in its assumptions about what constitutes pleasure and, more insidiously, what this pleasure looks like; even Freud was troubled by his theory's inadequate explanation of female experience. Yet the gender bias of contemporary narratology seems not to have troubled our profession's most prominent practitioners of narrative theory and advocates of textual pleasure" (506).

[10] I will render the signifier "revision" at times as "re-vision" so that two senses are put into play, the first being "a change or a new version" and the second

emphasizing sight or imagination as in "seeing again."

[11] The correlation between the number of analpeses and the number of pages per section gives an indication of the analeptic activity per section: section 1: 28 analepses/75 pages; section 2: 4 analepses/29 pages; section 3: 11 analepses/32 pages; section 4: 6 analepses/11 pages; section 5: 4 analepses/7 pages; section 6: 7 analepses/16 pages; section 7: 8 analepses/25 pages.

[12] It is important to note that although Winnett focuses here on sexuality, she states that she does not think "that textual production and narrative dynamics are matters of sexuality alone" (508).

[13] La Copine would be the exception to prospection among female characters. Although La Copine facilitates and encourages Chéri's interest in the past, she functions capably in the narrative present.

[14] Jean Larnac insists that Colette, along with Loti and Anatole France, "ont déroulé à leur fantaisie la trame de leur rêve ou de leur méditation, sans souci de 'l'histoire'" (Colette 183). When speaking of Colette specifically, Larnac categorizes her "plotlessness" more negatively: "L'intrigue lâche ou capricieuse de ses romans n'est là que comme prétexte, pour lui permettre de nous montrer quelque coin ignoré de sa sensibilité" (Colette 184).

CHAPTER III

Re-engendered Plots: From Destinations to Deviations

"Pourquoi es-tu là toute
seule? et pourquoi pas
ailleurs?..."

-- Colette, La Vagabonde

In different ways, the first two chapters of this study disturb notions surrounding the traditional concept of plot. In Chapter I, the destabilized codes mark the text as sites of on-going production. Moreover, an analysis of La Fin de Chéri in Chapter II reveals temporal vacillations and "instances of reflection," supposedly "uneventful" from a strict narratological perspective, to be productive sites for reconsideration both of Colette's text and of narrative systems based on an "active" Aristotelian model. In this chapter, I will consider another aspect of plot: the ending. This consideration will not depend, however, on textual closure in the structured, Aristotelian sense -- "a thing is a whole if it has a beginning, a middle and an end" (Poetics 52) --, but rather on the fates or "endings" of female characters in specific narratives.[1]

Both Nancy K. Miller and Rachel Blau DuPlessis concern

themselves with endings, identifying over-determined gender codes that define and confine female characters to certain limiting outcomes. In this chapter, I refer to "gender" in the sense expressed succinctly by Simone de Beauvoir: "On ne naît pas femme: on le devient" (13). De Beauvoir questions the assumption of a particular female nature or essence, and although she bases her evaluations on existentialism and socialism, she nonetheless points cogently to the gender question. Since de Beauvoir, the issue of gender has received much critical attention. In The Technologies of Gender, Teresa de Lauretis develops an analysis by combining various gender theories that locate the organization and discourse of social systems as the producers and containers of "gender" in a "sex-gender system." According to de Lauretis:

> The sex-gender system, in short, is both a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society. If gender representations are social positions which carry differential meanings, then for someone to be represented and to represent oneself as male or female implies the assumption of the whole of those meaning effects. Thus, the proposition that the representation of gender is its

> construction, each term being at once the product and the process of the other, can be restated more accurately: The construction of gender is both the product and the process of its representation. (5, emphasis in original).

Nancy K. Miller takes gender into account in The Heroine's Text as she focuses on eighteenth-century feminocentric novels (novels written by men about women) in order to identify the various "endings" prescribed to female characters. Miller develops two opposing "endings" for the heroine. In the "euphoric text," the heroine is successfully assimilated into patriarchal culture through marriage, while in the "dysphoric text," she is instead rejected, resulting in her literal or figurative death. For Miller, male authors of feminocentric texts write from an ideological stance that "codes femininity in paradigms of sexual vulnerability" (Heroine's Text xi). These male authors thus plot their heroines' "ending" according to dominant gender ideologies that contain the female characters within self-validating patriarchal systems.

In a later essay, Miller contrasts the Western cultural assumptions that these male authors share in writing about women to the more analytical ways in which women authors produce texts, arguing that "female-authored

fiction generally questions the costs and overdetermination of this particular narrative economy with an insistence such that the stories produced provide internal commentary on the status of female plot itself" (Writing (from) the Feminine 125-126). Like Miller, Rachel Blau DuPlessis concerns herself with just such an "internal commentary on the status of female plot itself" in Writing Beyond the Ending by locating moments of resistance to conventional feminocentric gender coding. In particular, DuPlessis investigates ways in which selected twentieth-century women writers resist the gendered overdetermination inherent in nineteenth-century romantic endings by writing beyond these conventional structures in their fiction and poetry:

> So there is an array of narrative strategies invented or deployed by female writers of the twentieth century explicitly to delegitimate romance plots and related narratives. These strategies involve reparenting in invented families, fraternal-sororal ties temporarily reducing romance, and emotional attachment to women in bisexual love plots, female bonding, and lesbianism. . . . As well, the writers undertake a reassessment of the mechanisms of social insertion of women through the family house, the private sphere, and patriarchal hierarchies, inventing narratives that offer, in the multiple individual and the collective protagonist, an

alternative to individual quests and couple formation. (xi)

DuPlessis's formidable list of alternatives to the heterosexual couple-ending for female characters reverberates in Miller's reiteration of the possibility of an ending beyond the heterosexual couple in her study of Colette's La Vagabonde. By expanding her theory of the "euphoric" ending first described in The Heroine's Text and considering Renée Néré of La Vagabonde in this light, Miller, like DuPlessis, calls for a movement beyond the romantic ending for female characters. Miller describes this movement as a gesture beyond the "notion of plot that requires the destination of 'home'" (Woman of Letters 275). In connecting Colette's punning use of the English word "home" in La Vagabonde to the French homme, Miller conflates the semantic and cultural connections implied by "home," the stereotypical site of orderly English domesticity, and homme, the only patriarchally sanctioned receiver of a woman's love. Through this conflation, Miller can juxtapose the home/homme destination with an alternative one -- a space for writing -- that the female protagonist, Renée Néré, ultimately locates. Like DuPlessis, then, Miller suggests that "writing beyond" predetermined gender codes constitutes a mode of resistance to traditionally prescribed female plot lines,

a mode that ultimately alters traditional novelistic endings for female characters.

In this chapter, I propose to extend the examination of this homme/home conflation to four novels by Colette which constitute two sets of sequels, La Vagabonde (1911) and L'Entrave (1913), Duo (1934) and Le Toutounier (1939), in order to locate within these texts various loci of resistance to and movement beyond the heroine's gender-determined homme/home destination. I have chosen these four novels, not only for the relationship between them as sequels, but also for the linear progression of romantic heterosexual relations that the four novels represent. While this linearity from courtship (La Vagabonde), to physical love (L'Entrave), to married life (Duo), to widowhood (Le Toutounier) would seem to confirm the assimilation or "euphoric" ending that characterizes feminocentric texts, Colette's novels reveal instead a resistance to the euphoric homme/home fate.[2] In exploring these novels, I will follow some of the pathways diverging away from homme that Miller and DuPlessis describe and then will direct the analysis toward an altogether "homely" gender-resistant space.

Before venturing along these pathways, however, I will briefly describe the literary terrain. La Vagabonde features Renée Néré, a "failed" novelist who, after a traumatic marriage and divorce, has chosen to earn her

living as a dancer and mime. Suffering from loneliness and a fear of aging, Renée nonetheless values her independence. After resisting the romantic advances of a wealthy and conventional bourgeois, Maxime Dufferein-Chautel, Renée finally falls in love with him and seriously considers both his marriage proposal and his offer of an orderly and leisurely existence. While Renée finds his physical presence intoxicating, this presence fades as she tours the provinces with her fellow performers. In order to communicate with Max, Renée must again take up her pen. As she writes, she reaffirms her initial rejection of the feminine role that marriage requires, opting instead for a theatrical tour of South America. L'Entrave picks up Renée's life several years later. She has come into a small inheritance and spends her time traveling. In Nice, Maxime Dufferein-Chautel, accompanied by his new wife and baby, passes Renée on the boardwalk. While Max does not notice Renée, she sees him clearly and again reviews her own life choices. After this sighting, Renée continues to spend her days in Nice with her friend May, May's lover, Jean, and Massau, an opium addict whom Jean supports in return for his companionship and service. When Jean breaks off with May and turns his attentions toward Renée, she quickly leaves Nice. Jean follows her, and Renée finally accepts his physical love but refuses the emotional subservience that Jean expects

of her. While Renée pursues a purely physical relationship, Jean demands more. Renée finally relents, accepting the traditionally secondary role of the woman within a conventional heterosexual couple.[3]

Duo presents several days in the life of Alice and her husband of ten years, Michel. While spending their Easter vacation on his family's deteriorating country estate, Michel discovers that Alice has had a brief affair with Ambrogio, one of his business associates. Alice makes numerous attempts to save their relationship, but these are sabotaged by Michel's jealousy and his determination to control and punish Alice through continual demonstrations of his suffering. Michel insists that Alice continue to provide information about the affair, information that he immediately uses against her. Finally, Alice gives Michel the three short letters that comprise her entire correspondence with Ambrogio, hoping that Michel's need for information will at last be satisfied and that he can begin to recover. But the contents of the letters heighten Michel's jealousy to the point that he commits suicide by drowning himself in the river. In Le Toutounier the widowed Alice returns to her family apartment in Paris where two of her three sisters still live. While she seeks a respite from the demands of heterosexual relations, her sisters, Colombe and Hermine, draw closer to the men in their lives and plan to leave

the family apartment that they have inhabited for so many years. The newly independent Alice often feels estranged as she observes her sisters struggling within the thralls of romantic love. Finally, Alice decides to make the familial apartment her home again even though her sisters will be leaving.

1. Homme-sick Heroines

Colette's texts maintain a certain linguistic resistance to the homme destination by opening discursive paths that deviate from accepted norms of heterosexual culture. In all four novels, the female protagonists encounter stifling and exclusionary discourses which they resist either through rejection or by employing a different linguistic code altogether. In La Vagabonde and L'Entrave, Renée Néré refuses the formulaic phrases of endearment that characterize heterosexual courting. The first time that her suitor, Maxime Dufferein-Chautel, speaks to her with "loving" words in La Vagabonde, Renée hears the echo of the deceitful man whom she has divorced after years of traumatic marriage:

> -- Mon enfant chérie, qu'est-ce que vous avez?
>
> Le cri étouffé, le tressaillement qui lui répondent, les oubliera-t-il? je l'espère... "Mon enfant chérie..." Son premier mot de tendresse, c'est "Mon enfant chérie!" Le même mot, et presque le même

accent que l'autre... (V 139)[4]

In a later scene, Max realizes that although he has declared his love to Renée, she has never voiced the words "je t'aime" in return. For Renée, the restrictive romantic vocabulary that Max employs so effortlessly contains her own emotional victimization:

> "C'est la vérité. J'espérais follement qu'il ne s'en apercevrait pas. . . . Je ne veux plus le dire, je ne veux plus le dire jamais! Je ne veux plus entendre cette voix, ma voix d'autrefois, brisée, basse, murmurer irrésistiblement le mot d'autrefois... Seulement, je n'en sais pas d'autre... Il n'y en a pas d'autre..." (V 176)

Similarly, in L'Entrave, the lover, Jean, with whom Renée tries to maintain a purely physical relationship, also declares his love unproblematically and also expects a reciprocal declaration:

> -- Tu comprends... je t'aime...
>
> Je le secoue doucement:
>
> -- Qu'est-ce que tu racontes?
>
> -- Mais oui... tu comprends... l'amour...
>
> Je ferme, en y pressant ma joue, la belle bouche imprudente:
>
> -- Chut!... pas ce mot-là! Adieu. Tais-toi. Dormons! (E 150)

In Duo, the female protagonist, Alice, experiences a

similar sense of linguistic confinement as she attempts to explain the brief affair she has had to her husband, Michel. Alice finds that she must employ a vocabulary that can only describe, as Adrienne Rich points out, "the adolescent male sex drive, which, as both young women and men are taught, once triggered cannot take responsibility for itself or take no for an answer" and which is, in short, "a condition of arrested sexual development" (47). It is not surprising, then, that this discourse of male sexuality does not admit alternative vocabularies of feminine desire. While Alice cannot find words within this masculine discourse to express her desires and actions accurately, Michel succeeds in setting precise linguistic boundaries for "acceptable" infidelity, boundaries which, as Rich has noted, exclude desire that differs from a certain masculine heterosexual norm:

> -- Ah! ma pauvre petite... Tu ne comprendras jamais ce que c'est qu'un homme qui aime, ni l'idée qu'un homme se fait de la trahison... Tu ne comprendras jamais qu'un homme pardonne, oublie presque une histoire de coucherie, une surprise de sens...
>
> -- Pour cause, dit-elle sèchement.
>
> Il la regarda en face, fort de ses droits d'homme à désirs brefs. (D 1151)

Michel's linguistically coded desire precludes signifiers for Alice's pleasure. Although Alice has already

vigorously rejected the derogatory term coucherie as a demeaning and false representation of her affair -- "Imbécile. Oh! ça, oui, imbécile. On croirait que tu ne me connais pas. Une coucherie. Tu as lâché ton grand mot, ta grande peur. Ça me ressemble, hein, de m'offrir un homme entre deux portes!" (D 1147) --, Michel refuses to eliminate such a key signifier from his vocabulary. While Alice first reacts in mute anger to his insistence on a term that in no way describes her desire or actions, her second inclination is to laugh, albeit silently, as she muses:

> "Le plus drôle, c'est qu'il croit qu'il sait ce que c'est qu'un désir de femme..." Elle se permit un rire silencieux, pendant qu'il s'enfonçait dans l'ombre, entre les deux bibliothèques." (D 1151-1152)

For Luce Irigaray, Alice's silent laugh represents a significant gesture, part of women's resistance to the repression of her pleasure:

> Echapper au renversement pur et simple de la position masculine, c'est, en tout cas, ne pas oublier de rire. Ne pas oublier que la dimension du désir, du plaisir, est intraduisible, irréprésentable, irrelevable, dans le "sérieux" -- l'adéquation, l'univocité, la vérité... -- d'un discours que prétend en dire le sens . . . le dire vrai constitue l'interdit de la

> jouissance de la femme, et donc du rapport sexuel. Le recouvrement de sa, de la puissance dans le pouvoir légiférant du discours. C'est d'ailleurs en ce lieu que se situe, aujourd'hui, l'enjeu le plus virulent de l'oppression de la femme: les hommes veulent garder l'initiative du discours sur la et donc sa jouissance." (Ce Sexe 157-158, emphasis in original)

In an attempt to escape from such linguistic oppression, Alice tries to express her desire within Michel's closed system, but her discourse ricochets from his well constructed discursive barriers. Realizing this impasse, Alice protests: "Mais je commence à croire qu'un homme et une femme peuvent tout faire ensemble impunément, tout, sauf la conversation" (D 1175).

In La Vagabonde, Renée also recognizes her confinement in expressing desire. In a letter to Max, she mentions having met a lesbian colleague with whom she has previously worked and whom she greatly admires. Like Michel, Max does not hesitate to define acceptable limits within which desire is allowed to circulate, and Renée, like Alice, understands the futility of attempting to express herself in resistance, however tactful, to discourse that privileges masculine pleasure:

> Ma main, sur le rebord du balcon, froisse le dernier billet de mon ami, qui répond à ma lettre de

> Lyon. Il s'y souvient, hors de propos, que ma camarade Amalia Barally n'aimait pas les hommes! Il n'a pas manqué, en être "normal" et "bien équilibré" qu'il est, de flétrir un peu, en la raillant, ma vieille amie, et de nommer "vice" ce qu'il ne comprend pas. A quoi bon lui expliquer? . . . A quoi bon écrire, -- et plaider, -- et discuter?... Mon voluptueux ami ne comprend que l'amour..."
> (V 214-215, emphasis added)

In making this statement, Renée recognizes the exclusively heterosexual relations that the term l'amour describes within dominant masculine discourses of pleasure. In effect, the term l'amour rigidly contains heterosexual romantic coding by excluding sexual and sentimental alternatives and thereby reinforcing heterosexual privilege.

Both Renée and Alice resist a masculine discourse that seeks to contain them within the exclusionary sexual economy of l'amour. While recognizing and rejecting this amorous discourse proves to be a viable mode of resistance, this resistance can be further strengthened by employing other linguistic codes altogether. In Le Toutounier, Alice, now a widow since Michel's suicide, displaces the vocabulary of l'amour with sororal "mots de passe" (D 1159). She returns to her family's Parisian apartment and to her sisters, Colombe and Hermine, with

whom she shares a private discourse, "le ton toutounier" (T 16), composed of invented words that the sisters have used since childhood. Robert Cottrell's criticism of the "ton"'s vocabulary as well as of the sense of intimacy that results from its use demonstrates the extent to which this alternative discourse in Le Toutounier challenges the linguistic patterns familiar to l'amour:

> The tone of the novel is correspondingly girlish and feminine. Although the sisters range in age from twenty-nine to thirty-seven, their language is full of vapid schoolgirl argot and chatter that may well strike a reader as an unpleasant affectation. Moreover, in an attempt to charge the atmosphere of the novel with an exclusively feminine presence, Colette repeatedly refers to the sister's legs, arms, eyes, hips, to their various odors, and to their breasts which pop out of their negligees rather more frequently than one might reasonably expect. (110-111)[5]

For the sisters who have depended on each other over the years more than on their now deceased father for their material survival during adolescence, the "ton toutounier" constitutes "une liberté invétérée de plaisanter sans rire, de n'éviter aucun sujet de conversation, de garder leur sang-froid presque en toutes circonstances, et de s'abstenir des larmes" (T 16, emphasis added). While the

actual "toutounier" in the novel is a large leather couch shared at one time by all four sisters, it stands metaphorically as the physical and emotional space that the women still share. Far from being "girlish," the "ton toutounier" works against gender stereotyping and patriarchal discourses. Among themselves, these female characters extend to each other the freedom to eschew their learned feminine responses to discourse. They are required neither to laugh at each other's jokes, nor to react to situations with the expected feminine responses of hysteria or tears. And, more importantly, they do not consider the discussion of any subject to be beyond their ability. The "ton" pervades their shared discourse, reaffirming their interdependence:

> Elles n'avaient pas connu des luttes intestines, ni de rivalités familiales. Leurs combats étaient d'autre sorte. Lutte pour manger, pour enlever un poste de dessinatrice, un emploi de vendeuse, de secrétaire, d'accompagnatrice dans un beuglant de quartier; former, à elles quatre, un quatuor à cordes, médiocre, pour les grands cafés. . . . Des vies pures, en somme, des vies de filles pauvres et dédaigneuses, fringantes sur leurs talons tournés, et qui toisaient l'amour sans considération, d'un air de dire: "Pousse-toi un peu, mon vieux, fais-toi petit... Avant toi, il y a la faim, la férocité et le besoin de rire..." (T 52-53)

While Cottrell reads this vocabulary of solidarity ("busette" [front door key], "sisibecques" [cigarettes], and the many uses of "guézézi"[6]) as "vapid," I maintain that the use of these expressions constitutes a significant alternative mode of discourse for the sisters. Although the "ton"'s disruption of dominant discourses may be fragmented and momentary, this shared vocabulary constantly renews a sororal bond made long before the "intrusion" of l'amour into the sisters' language and lives. The sensual and agile shared sororal voice may indeed sound "affected" to a reader like Cottrell, whose expectations of references to women's bodily parts (and their containment) are as unreasonable as his imposition of a particular linguistic code. In effect, the sisters' shared language undermines masculine discourses upon which homme, as euphoric destination, depends in that through this language, the female characters in Le Toutounier, like those that Dale Bauer describes in Feminist Dialogics, avoid full participation "in a language which would erase their difference" (4).

In addition to the linguistic resistance in these novels to homme as purveyor of a masculine discourse that precludes the expression of women's desire, a second mode of resistance manifests itself as the movement toward other women that DuPlessis calls "female bonding" (xi). Adrienne Rich describes the attraction between women as

"profound emotional impulses and complementarities" that the patriarchal code of "compulsory heterosexuality" seeks to repress through its myth of a "mystical/biological heterosexual inclination, a 'preference' or 'choice' which draws women to men" (34). Although the novels treated here describe sensual but not sexually established lesbian relationships, the dynamic of women turning toward each other in the act of resistance to male characters nonetheless figures importantly, demonstrating ways in which "the erotic and emotional intensity of women's friendships cuts the Gordian knots of both heterosexuality and narrative convention" (DuPlessis 149).[7]

In Duo, the main characters, Alice, Michel, and Maria, who began her service at Crasnac during the same year that Michel married Alice, form two couple combinations that rival each other: Michel/Alice and Michel/Maria. In systematically rejecting Alice's explanations of her brief affair, Michel increasingly demands Maria's attention and approval. While Maria complies gladly at the beginning of the novel, cherishing the male attention that her own taciturn husband refuses her, alliances gradually change. The more Michel dissimulates in an attempt to dispel his self-imposed image as cuckold, the more Maria resists his demands:

> Il grommelait, et Alice tendait l'oreille à sa récrimination d'enfant arbitrairement puni. "Lui

aussi, il a senti quelque chose. Un mouvement de Maria contre lui." (D 1157)

A supportive relationship between Alice and Maria eventually forms. When Michel vents his anger against Alice by smashing a pitcher against the wall, Maria responds "'Ah! c'est Monsieur... Eh bien, il n'aurait pas dû'" (D 1168). Later that day, the women react with emotion when they find themselves alone together for the first time:

> L'une assise, l'autre debout, elles pensaient toutes deux qu'elles se trouvaient seules pour la première fois, et singuliérement émues. (D 1170)

In a preliminary gesture of intimacy, Maria tells Alice one of her culinary secrets and offers a second gesture, moments later, by physically steadying Alice when Michel visibly upsets her. At first, Maria shows Alice "son nouveau visage d'alliée lointaine" (D 1173), but the women quickly grow closer as Alice offers to re-bandage the arm that Maria's husband had purposefully burned. When Alice notices that the original bandage has been poorly applied, Maria replies:

> -- Pour le travail d'une seule main, ce n'est pas si mal. Voyez Madame: mis d'une main, attaché avec les dents.
>
> -- Et votre mari, il ne pouvait pas vous aider? Les

> yeux de Maria brillèrent et rirent dans ses rides:
>
> -- Il m'a bien aidée. Mais pas à me panser. (D 1180)

Learning that Maria's husband purposefully inflicted the wound because "il est mon homme et que je suis sa femme. Ça suffit bien. Madame ne croit pas?" (D 1181), Alice's supportive relationship with Maria grows even stronger. Alice bandages the arm while Maria, in a gesture of intimacy, signals her gratitude:

> Mais, avant de rabattre sa manche, elle pressa contre sa joue inclinée le pansement blanc, comme elle eût fait d'un nouveau-né emmailloté. (D 1181)

With Michel's suicide, the bond between Alice and Maria solidifies even further as Maria stands beside Alice in the face of hostile, accusing neighbors: "Elle couchait à côté de moi, dans le salon. Moi sur un canapé, elle sur l'autre, dans sa grande chemise de nonne" (T 21).

This movement of women toward one another continues as Alice seeks out her sisters in Le Toutounier. Arriving in the afternoon to an empty apartment, Alice performs a doubly ritual gesture away from patriarchal coding and toward female bonding by exchanging her black widow's dress for a bright new outfit belonging to one of her sisters. In substituting the yellow and green outfit for her official black dress, Alice transgresses the strict rules of imposed mourning. This colorful outfit, unlike

the black dress, does not remind Alice constantly of her husband's death, but rather enhances the close physical bond she shares with her sisters:

> Les soeurs Eudes n'étaient pas jumelles, mais égales et ressemblantes par leurs grands beaux corps qui autrefois se servaient d'un costume pour deux, d'un chapeau pour trois, et d'une paire de gants pour quatre. (T 9)

Together again with her sisters, Alice enjoys contemplating their bodies. Observing first Colombe and then Hermine during an evening meal in a local restaurant, Alice marvels at the subtle variations between them:

> "Belle figure," songeait Alice. "Elle a des virgules dans les coins de la bouche, des lèvres comme les miennes, mais devenues plus minces à force de serrer la cigarette en lisant, en jouant du piano, en chantant, en parlant. . . . La petite est bien jolie, malgré ses cheveux blonds, ou à cause de ses cheveux blonds." (T 44)

Moreover, in sleeping on the "toutounier" with her sisters, Alice shares a physical closeness that is more intense and lasting than her relationship with Michel:

> Le vivant voisinage ne lui rappelait aucun souvenir conjugal. Mariée à Michel, elle n'avait admis, en dehors des heures amoureuses, que les lits jumeaux. Quelquefois, assoupie par surprise aux côtés de

> Michel, il lui était arrivé d'oublier le lieu de son sommeil, et de parler à quelqu'une de la horde: "Pousse-toi Colombe... Bizoute, quelle heure est-il?..." Mais sur le toutounier natal, quand un grand bras féminin tombait en travers de son repos, jamais Alice n'avait soupiré: "Laisse-moi, Michel..." (T 161-162)

For Alice, the sororal sensuality that she enjoys does not require heterosexual fulfillment for its validation but functions, rather, as a vital and pleasurable alternative to the heterosexual, romantic "ending" that homme represents.

2. (Un)Heimlich Places

In addition to Renée and Alice's deviations from homme as romantic ending through their challenges to the linguistic dominance enjoyed by male characters as well as through the female bonding that, at least partially, transcends the confines of patriarchal restrictions, all four novels produce a second element of "writing beyond," an element that challenges another privileged space -- that of the patriarchally coded "home." In La Vagabonde, Renée resists the notion of "home" as a euphoric end-point by defining "home" differently than Max, the representative par excellence of patriarchal bourgeois culture. Max envisions Renée's "home" as a familiarizing

space in which Renée's artificiality as a music hall entertainer is replaced by her image as a respectable bourgeoise. Upon seeing Renée's apartment for the first time, Max exclaims:

> -- Le joli coin intime! Et comme on comprend mal votre existence au music-hall, quand on vous voit ici, entre cette lampe rose et ce vase d'oeillets! (V 85)

For Max, such a familiar domestic scene (the woman sitting in her salon next to a vase of flowers) corresponds to his sense of bourgeois, domestic order. Renée, however, interprets the same scene otherwise: the small, modestly priced rooms in her building, an apartment house reserved for single women, "le paria des propriétaires" (V 13), remind her of her diminished status as a woman displaced among the tattered, cast-off furnishings of a failed marriage. For Renée, the space that Max sees as a "joli coin intime" is "un abri, et non un home" (V 193). Renée's comment echoes in Luce Irigaray's resistance to "home" ("le foyer") which, according to Irigaray, guarantees women's fatal enclosure within patriarchally patterned spaces:

> Ce n'est pas que nous ayons un territoire propre, mais leur patrie, famille, foyer, discours, nous emprisonnent dans des espaces clos où nous ne pouvons continuer à nous mouvoir. (Ce Sexe 211)

In contrast to Max's patriarchal version of "home" as a

familiar and familial domestic space, the female protagonists encounter alternative spaces in which this confining "familiarity" gives way to estrangement -- a dynamic that I will call, after the Russian Formalists, defamiliarization. I have chosen this term not because I intend to apply formalist theories directly to Colette's texts, but because the dynamic of defamiliarization described by the Russian Formalists parallels a similar dynamic within these novels.

In addressing the concept of defamiliarization, Shklovsky opposes a literary tradition in which the unfamiliar is made easily recognizable. According to Tony Bennett, "more at the level of content, the Formalists sought to reveal the devices through which the total structure of given works of literature might be said to defamiliarize, make strange or challenge certain dominant conceptions -- ideologies even, although they did not use the word -- of the social world" (21). Shklovsky states that "after we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it -- hence we cannot say anything significant about it" (13).[8] This dynamic, according to which the object readily becomes familiar and is henceforth no longer seen, corresponds to Max's system of perception in La Vagabonde. A representative of bourgeois culture and patriarchal authority, Max equates

certain familiar objects (the lamp, the vase of flowers) with preconceived notions of domesticity. According to Shklovsky, defamiliarization occurs as "art removes objects from the automatism of perception..." (13). In a similar way, as Renée offers her alternative version of Max's scene of domestic tranquility, she assigns to it her own sense of estrangement, thereby defamiliarizing his received notion of "home" as a desirable domestic end-point.

In La Vagabonde and L'Entrave, Renée resists Max's stereotypical idea of "home" by replacing it with the depersonalized spaces connected with travel. As Renée contemplates leaving her apartment for a forty-day performance tour she muses:

> "Un abri, et non un home, -- c'est tout ce que je laisse derrière moi: les boîtes roulantes de seconde et première classes, et les hôtels de tout ordre, et les sordides loges des music-halls de Paris, de la province et de l'étranger, me furent plus familier, plus tutélaires que ceci, nommé par mon ami 'un joli coin intime'!" (V 193)

Renée experiences a greater sense of "home" ("chez moi") in disorderly hotel rooms than in her "joli coin intime": "Je me sens chez moi, parmi ce désordre de campement, ce n'importe où et ce n'importe comment, et plus légère qu'en mes meubles hantés..." (V 237). Likewise, as she

contemplates the luxurious and orderly "home" that Max offers her, Renée experiences a moment of revulsion, envisioning his country estate as a place of drudgery and required obedience:

> "Que vas-tu faire dans cette galère... pas même! dans ce bateau-lavoir, solidement amarré, où l'on blanchit une lessive patriarcale?" (V 239)

So strong is this pull away from a patriarchal "home" and toward the depersonalized space of a hotel room that Renée ultimately accepts a South American tour rather than the oppressively familiar domestic "home" that Max seems so willing to provide.

Three years after she refuses Max's offer of a "home," Renée of L'Entrave, having received a small inheritance and having retired from the stage, still prefers the impersonal space of a hotel room, even after she becomes sexually involved with Jean. Having first known Jean as a friend's lover and as part of a group of aimless hotel dwellers on the Riviera, Renée insists on maintaining a pleasurable sensual relationship with him without consenting to the secondary role that l'amour requires. As their affair intensifies, Renée rents a room at the Hotel Meurice while spending part of each day at Jean's Parisian house. Inside his house, however, Renée refuses to take on either the typically feminine domestic role or the secondary sexual role that Jean's patriarchal version

of "home" requires. For this reason, Jean criticizes her:

> -- Tu n'arranges pas les fleurs dans les vases, tu ne tires pas le coin du tapis de la table quand il est de travers, tu ne tapes pas les coussins de la chaise longue. . . . tu fais dame-en-visite, et ça me gêne. . . . Tu n'es donc pas mon amie? Tu n'as donc pas envie de m'adopter comme je t'adopte?... Il y a des jours où tu m'humilies, avec ta hâte à te déshabiller avant, et à te rhabiller après... Des jours où on ne dirait vraiment pas que tu m'aimes, mais que tu... m'emploies. (E 167-168)

Finally abandoning her room at the Hotel Meurice for Jean's "home," she installs herself as she would in any hotel room with her "trois malles de robes et de linge, des paperasses dans un coffret, un sac de toilette" (E 177). Like her hotel stays, Renée views this new living arrangement with Jean as temporary. In moments of impatience she thinks to herself: "Cela durera autant que tu le voudras bien, et pas davantage..." (E 179). In the last pages of the novel, however, Renée acquiesces to the demands of <u>l'amour</u>, accepting as "home" her place at Jean's side: "Je crois que beaucoup de femmes errent d'abord comme moi, avant de reprendre leur place, qui est <u>en deçà</u> de l'homme..." (242, emphasis in original). While this strong statement would seem to undermine, if not invalidate, Renée's previous habitation of a

defamiliarized space outside the patriarchal "home," the novel nonetheless presents a concerted argument against the overdetermination of a woman's place, an argument that contributes significantly to "writing beyond" the patriarchal "home."

In Duo, the culturally stereotypical "home" continues to be defamiliarized as Alice experiences separation from and strangeness of domestic spaces. At Crasnac, her husband's family estate, Alice, stopping at the doorway to the house, "mesurait l'ombre que l'heure de midi installait dans le vestibule, et revenait sur la terrasse sans vouloir s'avouer que cette ombre profonde, parallèle à la pierre du seuil et qui cheminait sur le dallage, lui faisait aujourd'hui un peu peur" (1157-1158). When Alice returns in Le Toutounier to the Parisian apartment that she had shared with her husband, this fear augments into a phenomenon that may be likened to Freud's description of the unheimlich (the uncanny). In analyzing the unheimlich, Freud, like Shklovsky, concentrates on the dynamic through which the familiar is rendered unfamiliar. While the heimlich ("homely") designates "what is familiar and agreeable," it also contains a second meaning which overlaps with the unheimlich: "what is concealed or kept out of sight" (224). Although Freud's essay equates this concealment with childhood repression, his theory of "the uncanny" nonetheless shares with the Formalists'

defamiliarization the same investigation of mechanisms for "making the familiar seem strange" (Shklovsky 5). According to Freud, "we understand why linguistic usage has extended das Heimliche into its opposite, das Unheimliche; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (241).

Thus, the "homely" apartment that Alice and Michel shared in Duo turns uncanny upon her return to it. While at first she experiences acute regret triggered by familiar odors, her emotion quickly turns to fear as familiar objects defamiliarize themselves:

> Elle alla ouvrir, d'une main ferme, le cabinet de travail de Michel, éclaira largement la pièce, respira la faible odeur de cuir, d'eau de toilette parfumée, de tabac et de papier imprimé, qui fit monter à sa gorge un sanglot affectueux, des larmes de regret pur, qu'il lui eût été doux de verser longuement. Mais elle aperçut, posés sur le bureau, une paire de gants d'homme, en grosse peau d'un jaune sulfureux, les gants de Michel, et elle se mit à suer légèrement, en regardant de biais ces gants jaunes dont les doigts renflés, infléchis, imitaient l'attitude d'une main connue et vivante. (T 64-65)

In order to come to terms with the defamiliarizing effects

of Crasnac and Michel's death, Alice enters her familial apartment in Le Toutounier and searches for unchanged objects. She cherishes "la coupe de verre noir [qui] est toujours là" (T 8) and a "toutounier" cushion which "vint à la rencontre de [sa] nuque" (T 12). Almost immediately, however, Alice makes a new discovery that renders the apartment momentarily strange: "Qui donc a changé de parfum, ici? Colombe ou Hermine?" (T 8). From the novel's opening pages, a defamiliarizing dynamic operates in much the same way that Shklovsky describes it. For example, on the evening of her return, Alice experiences defamiliarizing effects:

> En face d'elle, les visages de ses deux soeurs, perdant soudain les caractéristiques imposées par l'aveugle habitude, se changèrent en visages étrangers, comme ceux que l'on rencontre une seule fois et qui ne cachent rien. (T 43)

The novel is permeated by this same dynamic through which familiar things, usually seen without really looking at them ("l'aveugle habitude"), turn strange. Throughout the novel, Hermine's odd behavior reinforces Alice's perception of strangeness: looking into the bedroom where Hermine sleeps, Alice thinks, "cette chambre, elle est comme Hermine, pleine d'un tas de choses que je ne connais pas" (T 95-96). Although Hermine is still seeing the same

married man, she no longer discusses her situation jovially. Instead, nervous and underweight, she has become secretive. By contrast, Colombe has maintained her role of many years as the platonic companion to a married orchestra conductor. As the novel progresses, Hermine and Colombe's romantic relationships change, pointing toward conventional heterosexual solutions. Colombe's friend invites her to work with him in the south of France, signaling a heightened commitment, while Hermine's lover proposes marriage after Hermine's attempt to shoot his wife. Although Hermine's assassination attempt shocks Alice, Colombe, hearing Hermine's footsteps in the street below, demonstrates approval, greeting Hermine noisily in the hall of the apartment house:

> -- Je sais tout! Il te résistait, tu l'as assassinée! Un éclat de rire enroué lui répondit, et Colombe s'en fut pieds nus à la rencontre de sa soeur, avec qui elle échangea des exclamations, des "Tu vas fort!," des chuchotements et des rires. "Elles sont folles," pensait Alice qui n'avait pas bougé. "Ou bien c'est moi qui ai perdu le ton de la maison, et la notion du comique que comporte un assassinat raté." (T 130, emphasis in original)

Again, Alice experiences defamiliarization. Elated by the promises of l'amour, her sisters take on an uncanny quality ("Elles sont folles"). In reaction to this effect

of estrangement, Alice feels a distancing in the form of a new "ton de la maison," one that she does not recognize. This distancing increases as her sisters continue to treat the attempted assassination lightly:

> "Elles jouent entre elles," songeait Alice. "Elles sont de la même caste, à présent. Pour combien de temps?" Les rires s'interrompirent, Hermine se tourna vers Alice avec une gentillesse trop marquée:
>
> -- On te secoue bien, aujourd'hui...
>
> "Je les gêne... Je suis la dépareillée... Elles ne vont plus oser faire la roue l'une devant l'autre, quand je serai présente..." (T 145)

Looking at her sisters from the point of view of a woman outside the thrall of l'amour, Alice recognizes exaggerated gestures ("Hermine se tourna vers Alice avec une gentillesse trop marquée"), and for the first time worries about sharing the intimate and sensual space of "le toutounier" with her sister Colombe: "Je vais bien te gêner?... Tu vas avoir besoin de remuer, de penser..." (T 156).

Like "le ton toutounier," the sisters have also shared "le code toutounier," a series of rules upon which they rely as guidelines designed to maintain their equilibrium and to extend mutual support. Throughout the novel, the sisters cite several sections of the code, for example, "Pas d'histoires pendant qu'on mange, paragraphe

III du code Toutounier. Paragraph IV: jamais de discussion en public," (T 47) and "Ce qui est à toi est à moi, ce qui est à moi est à toi" (T 157). As an augmentation and formalization of "le ton toutounier," the "code" is also rendered strange. In discussing Paragraphe VII of the code in terms of material possessions (the money that Alice will gladly give to Colombe), both sisters experience a moment of estrangement when they realize that their long-familiar code may not be able to withstand the incursion of l'amour:

> -- Texte à réviser, d'ailleurs. Vois-tu que Bizoute me fasse cadeau de son Bouttemy [Bizoute's husband]?
>
> -- Et que je m'approprie le Balabi [Colombe's "ami"]? Oui, texte à réviser... (T 157)

Faced with the departure of her sisters and the distancing from them that l'amour has brought about, Alice imagines living alone in the family "home," a space defamiliarized by a code that needs revision and by her sisters' impending departure. In the final paragraph of the text, as Hermine joins Colombe and Alice on the "toutounier" in what might be their last night together, the effects of defamiliarization continue to alter "le ton de la maison":

> Alice feignait d'ignorer la présence de la plus

> jeune soeur, de ne point sentir le corps pelotonné qui cherchait, peut-être pour la dernière fois, la protection des membres mêlés, la sauvage et chaste habitude du sommeil en commun. Elle se retourna comme en songe, posa sa main sur une tête petite et ronde, reconnut le parfum des cheveux blonds. Pourtant il ne lui vint aux lèvres que le nom de la quatrième fille, lointaine et perdue de l'autre côté du la terre. Son bras, tâtonnant, rencontra un genou soulevé, une épaule tiède, ça et là naufragés parmi l'obscurité et le sommeil...
>
> -- C'est toi, Bizoute? Bizoute, tu es là?
>
> -- Oui, soupira la voix d'Hermine.
>
> Alice accepta le mensonge tendre, et se rendormit. (T 163-164)

Through "le ton toutounier" the sisters have shared a language of mutual support and honesty. Yet, in this final page, the "ton" like the "code" undergoes revision. It is Alice who begins the process through dissimulation ("Alice <u>feignait</u> d'ignorer"). In response to her feint, she receives a falsehood, however loving, in return ("le mensonge tendre"). Alice discovers that the spaces which contained "family" and "familiarity" while she remained within patriarchal boundaries (i.e. as a "happily married woman") now reveal their "defamiliarizing" peripheries, creating strange, separating spaces which Alice hails

through the lost and distant sister ("la quatrième fille, lointaine et perdue de l'autre côté de la terre"). The widowed Alice, who has resisted her husband's linguistic tyranny and who responds to the idea of another heterosexual relationship "par une dénégation bien sèche" (T 162), sees in her sisters and her familial "home" partially unrecognizable entities that have become distant and strangely lost. And it is toward this defamiliarized space that Alice projects her future plans, contemplating her life within a solitary woman's space to which her sisters, after their encounters with l'amour, may ultimately return.

Like the depersonalized hotel rooms in which Renée feels free to live her life on her own terms, Alice contemplates the abandoned familial apartment as a possible space for her new life beyond the heterosexual couple. Renée and Alice's defamiliarized spaces prove to be viable alternatives to the patriarchal "home," spaces that intersect with Hélène Cixous's concept of an "elsewhere":

> Il y aura de l'ailleurs où l'autre n'y sera plus condamné à mort. Mais de l'ailleurs, est-ce qu'il y en a eu, est-ce qu'il y en a? S'il n'est pas encore "ici," il est déjà là, -- en cet autre lieu qui dérange l'ordre social, où le désir fait exister la fiction. (La jeune née 180)

For Cixous, this concept of "elsewhere," like the spaces into which Renée and Alice move beyond the patriarchal "home," disrupts social order. As I have shown, the female protagonists in La Vagabonde, L'Entrave, Duo and Le Toutounier move in subtle ways toward an "elsewhere" by deviating from circumscribed and gendered destinations. Their deviations vary, from rejecting masculine discourses of l'amour to bonding with other women, to moving beyond the spaces of containment that constitute the patriarchal "home." Cixous's "elsewhere," like Renée and Alice's defamiliarized "homes," constitutes a space within which woman (one possible "autre") may begin to live beyond the threat of psychic death through social and linguistic repression. Like the rain-swollen river in which Michel drowns, a river "qui battait à petit flot muet la clôture rompue du parc" (D 1193), Colette's texts engulf restrictive, discursive elements through subtle and repeated movement, breaking the confining "clôtures" that would enclose the female protagonists, and deviating beyond destinations predetermined by patriarchal rivages.

NOTES

[1] For discussions of closure in the novel, see Mortimer, Torgovnick and J. Hillis Miller.

[2] In this chapter, I will concentrate only on the assimilation ending for female characters that Miller describes in the "euphoric text" because Miller's other possible ending, the death ending that defines the "dysphoric text," does not apply to Colette's major novels. While Colette's male characters occasionally die, this fate rarely if ever befalls her female protagonists.

[3] Many of Colette's biographers have noted Colette's admitted dissatisfaction with the ending of L'Entrave, a dissatisfaction that Colette describes in L'Etoile Vesper as "le ton bénisseur d'une conclusion à laquelle on ne croit pas..." (qtd. in Sarde 320). Although the author's own sentiments do not factor into the analysis attempted here, it is nonetheless interesting that, of all of her novels, Colette should single out this ending for disapproval.

[4] References to the four novels shall be abbreviated as follows: La Vagabonde (V), L'Entrave (E), Duo (D), Le Toutounier (T).

[5] While less vehement in her criticism than Cottrell, Joan Hinde Stewart nonetheless calls the sisters' speech "childish" and characterizes Alice's actions as a

"regression to the mirror stage of existence" (78).

[6] In Margaret Crosland's translation of Le Toutounier, "guézézi" is one of the words in the sisters' shared language that she does not attempt to translate. For the sisters, "guézézi" possesses nurturing and positive connotations. They use it to calm each other and to bolster their courage (T 51), to ward off bad dreams (T 69), to soften a statement by emphasizing endearment (T 86), and finally, to name each other affectionately (T 123 -124).

[7] Other works by Colette do include more established lesbian relationships. For a general discussion of these works, see Stockinger.

[8] I. R. Titunik explains the tension between the "Formal Method," with its theory of defamiliarization, and the "Sociological Method" of marxist theory. According to Titunik, the Formalists argued that "that which constituted the 'literariness' of literature -- its specificity -- was something self-valuable, self-contained, and self-perpetuating that should and must be isolated from the social surroundings in which it existed in order to be made an object of knowledge; that while social forces and events could, and did, sometimes even drastically, affect literature from the outside, the real, intrinsic nature of literature remained immune, exclusively and forever true to itself alone; that

therefore, proper and productive study of literature is possible only in 'immanent' terms" (181). In contrast, Titunik explains that from a sociological stance "language cannot be said to break down into poetic and nonpoetic languages but can only be said to carry out different functions, the poetic function among them. . . . Therefore, the proper point of departure for investigation into the specificity of literature is not poetic language (a fiction in any case) but poetic context, poetic construction -- literary works of art themselves" (183).

CHAPTER IV

The Portrait's Demise: Writing "Subjectivities" in La Naissance du jour

> "O les zolis zyeux, tiens, zolie petite fille... Bouge pas, on va te faire ton portrait, pour que tu te mettes bien vite à lui ressembler."
>
> --Hélène Cixous, Le Rire de la Méduse

> "Imaginez-vous à me lire, que je fais mon portrait? Patience: c'est seulement mon modèle."
>
> --Colette, La Naissance du jour

I begin this chapter with a double opening gesture, juxtaposing the oft-cited epigraph from La Naissance du jour with a newly formed epigraph by Hélène Cixous. While both epigraphs refer to portraiture, the first exposes portraiture within Western culture as a phallocentric

practice while the second dissociates itself completely from the portrait-maker's art. This chapter complements the three preceding ones by exploring another destabilizing gesture that emerges in La Naissance du jour as a particular mode for writing the subject. In this chapter, I will focus on the notion of portraiture expressed in the epigraphical extract from Cixous's "Rire de la Méduse" in order to elucidate the reasons why the second epigraph resists "portrait" status. In determining the reasons for this resistance, I must initially ask several questions concerning the second epigraph, the first being that if La Naissance du jour generates not a portrait but a model, through what discursive process is this model produced? And the second, what does this model ultimately represent?

Before considering these questions, however, I will begin by describing the art of portraiture that Cixous's epigraph presents. In this epigraph, the portrait-maker functions as a cultural agent who enforces a certain containment upon the female model as "other." By addressing her with childish speech ("O les zolis zyeux"), the portrait-maker demeans the model while positioning her in a passive and silent linguistic pose ("Bouge pas). It is the portrait-maker who actively incorporates existing signifying systems into a defining art, depending in the process on the model's passivity.[1] From her passive

position, the model in Cixous's epigraph experiences her portrait as an imposition in that the portrait-maker actively imposes a dominant interpretation upon her ("pour que tu te mettes bien vite à lui ressembler"). Not only is the female model thus relegated to object status, the portrait-maker succeeds in self-depiction as the active subject capable of both interpretation and representation.[2]

The final step in the portrait-making process remains the formal act of linguistic framing. Through this process, the portrait-maker further excludes the female model from dominant discourse by including her within the repressed confines of a phallocentric language in which she cannot "actively" conceptualize her portrayed face ("imaginer," "se figurer," "envisager") without the confining boundaries of a linguistic frame. In being relegated to the status of "other," the female model functions not as a subject but as a reflecting object that projects the "truth" back onto the portrait-maker. Within this phallocentric system of representation, the model as non-subject undergoes a systematic and prolonged effacement through enforced passivity, an effacement that would not be possible in Cixous's notion of an "elsewhere": "Il y aura de l'ailleurs où l'autre n'y sera plus condamné à mort" (La Jeune Née 180).[3] In short, the practice of portraiture described by Cixous depends on a

phallocentric strategy that contains the female model within the death-like position of the "other." Similarly, in her discussion of the traditional art of the auto-portrait, Nancy K. Miller notes that "it is clear that the culture whose rhetorical matrix produces the codes of self-portrayal in question is unself-consciously male, literary, and patrilinear" (Anamnesis 172).

It is significant, then, that the second epigraph diverts the reader from portraiture, all the while recognizing the frustration ("Patience") that a detour around dominant cultural norms and toward a seemingly inferior ("seulement") coordinate might cause: "Imaginez-vous à me lire, que je fais mon portrait? Patience: c'est seulement mon modèle" (NJ 5).[4] This second epigraph appears once in the epigraphical position in La Naissance du jour, and a second time at the end of the fourth section (of the novel's eight), a repetition that folds the epigraph into the body of the text, thereby circulating the epigraph as both something to be imitated and as an imitation that obscures distinctions between border and interior.[5] This enfolding dynamic which projects the epigraph from La Naissance du jour into an undecidable circulation between imitation and imitated, contains within it a second element, the model, that mirrors en abyme this undecidable circulation. For the model, like the epigraph itself, "is both archetype and

copy, étalon and maquette" (Huffer 32).

Many early critics have attempted to stabilize this epigraph and its embedded model by identifying the model either as Colette the author, as the narrator, "Colette," a mature, twice-divorced woman who, having recently renounced physical love, recounts in an informal journal format a summer spent in Provence, or as "Colette"'s deceased mother, a figure whom "Colette" recalls in her journal by reciting, rewriting and reconsidering her mother's final letters. In their readings of the text, both Le Hardouin (126-127) and Fillon (12) interpret the epigraphical model as Colette, the author, while contemporary feminist criticism diverges widely from this view. Maintaining that "the model in question can only be the mother" (Anamnesis 165), Nancy K. Miller develops an interpretation of La Naissance du jour as a self-portrait which differs from the genre of traditional autobiography in that it is "coded by a rhetoric of selfhood, a culture that is female, para-literary and matrilinear" (Anamnesis 173).[6] Bethany Ladimer also designates the model as "Colette"'s mother, reading the epigraph as a "re-creation of the self through the mother" (84) while, at the same time, emphasizing the process of differentiation from the mother: "a portrait is a replica, but in this text, the character 'Colette' has separated and even grown distant from her mother. No longer the same, she now seeks to

establish sameness between herself and her 'model'" (84). Unlike the above interpretations in which either author or mother is clearly named as the model, Marie-Françoise Berthu-Courtivron, identifies the model as "Colette" the writer: "Placée en préambule et suivie d'une lettre maternelle, la dédicace semble signifier que le modèle à atteindre est celui de Sido [the mother]. Or, ce passage lui donne une toute autre dimension: le modèle recherché est celui de l'écrivain idéal qui aura réussi à son art, à remettre en perspective ses amours passées et leurs servitudes" (64). Lynne Huffer, like Miller and Ladimer, qualifies the model as "maternal" yet, unlike these critics, emphasizes the "ambiguity of this relationship between the female writer and her maternal model" (32).

My own reading coincides with Huffer's to the extent that I see the epigraphical "model" as "maternal," but not as "Colette"'s mother per se. I contend that the oft-cited mother-daughter relationship can be read otherwise, that this overt familial connection masks an intricate circulation between mother and daughter subject positions. This movement is prefigured by the boundary indistinctness inherent in the second epigraph itself as well as in its embedded "model," and this intricate circulation of subject positions gestures away from a dichotomy-based phallocentric portraiture through various differing and deferring mechanisms.[7] I shall begin to examine the ways

in which "Colette" rejects the portrait-maker's art by locating a privileged space within which she writes, a space that will require that I shift the locus of analysis from the current preliminary position of an epigraphical space to an even more "primary" position, that of the title itself.

1. Le "Oui" de la mèr(e)

At numerous points in her journal, "Colette" describes the pre-dawn world in which she and her mother eagerly anticipate daybreak. Why do mother and daughter await la naissance du jour with such keenness? "Colette"'s descriptions of daybreak provide an initial indication. For "Colette" the writer, daybreak occurs over the Mediterranean. From this vantage point, "Colette" describes both a scenic sea and a maternal vision through the familiar mère/mer metaphor:[8]

> Oui, je sais qu'il est trois heures et que je vais rendormir, et que je regretterai, à mon réveil, d'avoir gaspillé l'instant où le lait bleu commence à sourdre de la mer, gagne le ciel, s'y répand et s'arrête à une incision rouge au ras de l'horizon... (NJ 33)

The milky blueness ("le lait bleu") that wells up from mother/sea spreads its excess over the sky at the moment of birthing ("une incision rouge"). The actions of

springing up ("sourdre"), reaching ("gagner") and spilling over ("se répandre") join mère and mer in a metaphorical childbirth and lactation. As "Colette" describes her mother's daily auroral vigil, birthing metaphors continue to emerge:

> Ma mère montait et montait sans cesse sur l'échelle des heures, tâchant à posséder le commencement du commencement...je sais ce que c'est que cette ivresse-là. Mais elle quêta, elle, un rayon horizontal et rouge, et le pâle soufre qui vient avec le rayon rouge; elle voulut l'aile humide que la première abeille étire comme un bras. Elle obtint, du vent d'été qu'enfante l'approche du soleil, sa primeur en parfums d'acacia... (NJ 42-43)

For both mother and daughter, la naissance du jour functions as the moment in which they themselves are suspended with disparate elements such as air, water, wind, insects and light in a single and singular creative operation. With the break of day, here presented through the birthing metaphor ("le rayon rouge," "[le] vent d'été qu'enfante l'approche du soleil"), the writing daughter includes herself and her mother in the circularity of the auroral rotation during which elements merge into an indistinguishable milky blueness. Similarly, in emphasizing this birthing metaphor, "Colette" extends maternal creative potential to the daughter herself who,

through her writing, creates the corresponding mother. While traditional filiation requires a specific temporal linearity (mother creates daughter), in "la naissance du jour," a circularity displaces the causality of this traditional linearity (daughter creates mother creates daughter...) as the (re)productive attributes of mother and daughter circulate undecidably. Thus, a more complex relation emerges concerning the maternal metaphor. For not only does the fluidity of this mère/mer metaphor momentarily suspend the separateness of disparate elements through the daughter's act of writing, this fluidity also destabilizes the linear causality between mother and daughter.

In an intertextual echo, "Colette"'s mer/mère metaphor, which plays on the creative power of the female body and the sea, resounds in Irigaray's theorizing of fluidity. Irigaray associates the sea both with pregnancy and female jouissance.[9] Irigaray explains her stance as she evaluates Nietzsche's frequent use of marine metaphors:

> On sait le désir qu'avait Nietzsche d'être mère, et à quel point il souffrait de ne pouvoir l'être. L'élément marin, c'est donc à la fois les eaux amniotiques . . . et c'est quelque chose qui figure assez bien la jouissance féminine, y compris dans un mouvement de la mer, d'aller-retour, de flux continue

> qui me semble assez proche de ma jouissance en tant que femme, complètement étrangère à ce qu'est une économie de l'érection et de la détumescence. (Corps-à-corps 49)

Yet such metaphors, in their incorporation of the female body, inevitably raise questions concerning essentialism and the ways in which physiologically based feminist arguments may play into repressive political and social systems. From a certain perspective, feminists who emphasize the female body in their theories play into the traditionally restrictive and prescribed notions of "womanhood" that they are attempting to rewrite.[10] I contend that a critic's choice of a more or less essentialist stance is a calculated one. For example, emphasizing the strategic uses that some feminist theorists have made of essentialist positions, Diana Fuss argues that the move toward essentialism in Irigaray's female body metaphors is a deliberate one. Fuss values Irigaray's essentialism by demonstrating that far from undermining Irigaray's theoretical positions, this essentialism succeeds instead in disrupting the patriarchal concept of a female "essence." As Fuss explains:

> The problem, I would argue, is not with Irigaray; it is precisely Irigaray's deployment of essentialism

> which clarifies for us the contradiction at the heart of Aristotle's metaphysics. . . . I would go so far as to say that the dominant line of patriarchal thought since Artistotle is built on this central contradiction: woman has an essence and it is matter; or, put slightly differently, it is the essence of woman to have no essence. To the extent that Irigaray reopens the question of essence and woman's access to it, essentialism represents not a trap she falls into but rather a key strategy she puts into play, not a dangerous oversight but rather a lever of displacement" (72).[11]

In a similar way, I place strategic emphasis on "essentialist" female body metaphors in La Naissance du jour and in the theoretical texts that echo this "essentialism." By locating a metaphorical naissance du jour as a site for merging, I hope to show that, in certain ways, physiological metaphors do succeed in destabilizing the phallocentric binaries that inform the portrait-maker's art.

2. Imagining Otherwise

I propose to locate the naissance du jour as a sight of merging by reading it against Lacan's theory of the Imaginary. In interpreting Lacan's Imaginary, Jane Gallop describes the earliest period of human experience as a

"two-part birth process: once born into 'nature,' the second time into 'history'" (Reading Lacan 85). In other words, after being brought into a world of instinct and natural needs, the child must break from its "naturalness" in order to be "born again" into the requirements of its historical and cultural milieu. In the first phase of Lacan's Imaginary, which I will refer to as the "birth phase," Gallop concludes that the infant enjoys a brief "primordial, polymorphous autoerotic state" during which it perceives no rupture between itself and the surrounding people or objects that fulfill its needs (Reading Lacan 79).

Yet this initial primordial "birth phase" that Kristeva names the semiotic, actually turns out not to "exist" in Lacanian theory.[12] For, in the second phase, which I will call the "break phase," the child experiences the mirror stage, misrecognizing itself as a whole, coordinated entity. As a result of this misrecognition, the child separates itself from its previously merged state only to realize that it does not have the coordination and mastery that its mirror image reflects.[13] In determining a progression in Lacan's theory, Laplanche and Pontalis state: "For Lacan, it would be the mirror stage which would retroactively bring forth the phantasy of the body in bits and pieces" (qtd. in Gallop, Reading Lacan 80). In other words, once the child emerges from the

polymorphous "birth phase" into the "break phase," it looks back on the "birth phase" not as merging, but as "breakage," as the "bits and pieces" of the "fragmented body" that it now perceives.[14] Alienated from itself by the discrepancy between its mirror reflection of wholeness and mastery and its actual limited abilities, the child can no longer "imagine" a state in which alienation does not exist. Thus, from the "break phase" onward, the polymorphous nature of the "birth phase" can only be recalled in Lacanian thought as a fragmentation, while the "break phase" is perceived as a wholeness.

In La Naissance du jour, "Colette" eschews the "breakage" inherent in Lacanian theory, engaging instead in the symbolic gesture of writing as a means to create a metaphorical "birth phase" that constitutes a feminine imaginary in which the emphasis shifts from Lacan's insistence on the image and specularity to an inclusion of all of the senses and of the sensuality that results from such an inclusive gesture. While the Lacanian Imaginary would separate elements, "Colette" connects them in this feminine imaginary: water ("la mer"), air ("le ciel") and light ("une incision rouge") become a milky blueness ("le lait bleu") while sight ("le rayon rouge"), scent ("le pale soufre"), and touch ("l'aile humide") combine into one sensual moment. By creating a different imaginary space in which the boundaries between disparate elements

dissolve, "Colette" recovers a creative matrix that Ladimer calls the "lost source of inspiration based on rich corporeal connection" (82) and that Schor considers "the only matrix of fantasy and fiction" (Breaking the Chain 91). For "Colette," it is within this creative matrix that mother and daughter undergo a process of reconfigurations which, although suggestive of the portrait (reconfiguration), produces the epigraphical model instead.

3. Maternal Assayer

This process of reconfigurations reveals itself in the paragraph that contains the second epigraph. I have already established that the second epigraph appears twice in La Naissance du jour: once as a formal epigraph, and a second time as an enfolded textual element. By analyzing the paragraph in which the epigraph appears within the text, I will describe the process of reconfigurations and the role that this process plays in "Colette"'s writing project. In the paragraph, "Colette" describes the way in which her mother manages the abundance of her worldly life:

> Elle entasse, elle recense jusqu'aux coups, jusqu'aux cicatrices -- une cicatrice, c'est une marque qu'elle n'avait pas en naissant, une acquisition. Quand elle soupire: 'Ah! que de peines Il

> m'a données!' elle pèse, malgré elle, la valeur du mot, -- la valeur des dons. Elle les range peu à peu, harmonieusement. Le temps, et leur nombre, font qu'elle est obligée, dans la mesure où son trésor accroît, de se reculer un peu de lui, comme un peintre de son oeuvre. Elle recule, et revient, et recule, repousse à son rang quelque scandaleux détail, attire au jour un souvenir noyé d'ombre. Elle devient,-- par un art inespéré,-- équitable... Imagine-t-on, à me lire, que je fais mon portrait? Patience: c'est seulement mon modèle. (NJ 56-57)

Although reading the epigraph in context would seem to support earlier critical interpretations that name the mother as the model, I contend that while the mother occupies an important place in the daughter's psyche, the model to which the epigraph refers is not the mother as such, i.e. as the biological source and site of birth, but rather the process of reconfigurations which the daughter demonstrates through her writing of the maternal figure.

A close reading of the paragraph reveals this process as a rearranging and reshaping. The paragraph can be separated into two parts with a concluding sentence that reconnects the two sections. Each section contains three sentences, beginning with a verb connoting abundance followed by verbs that distribute this abundance and

ending with a short sentence summarizing the redistribution. Furthermore, each section sustains its own metaphors. In the first section, "entasser" suggests the mother's abundant life experiences that are further confirmed by the excess suggested in the phrases "valeur du mot" and "valeur des dons."[15] "Entasser" is followed by "recenser," "peser," and "ranger," which distribute this excessive abundance through harmonious measurement and rearrangement. In the second section, experiential abundance is likened to a "trésor." Here again, the passage begins with a verb that suggests bounty, "accroître." The verbs that follow, "reculer," "revenir," "repousser," and "attirer" describe an equaling out of forces between attraction and repulsion, a redistribution similar to that of the first section, now described in juridical terms as "equitable." Metaphorically, the mother treats her experience in the first part of the paragraph as a merchant would her goods, by counting, weighing, and arranging them. In the second half, the mother is directly compared to a painter. Unlike Cixous's portrait-maker who figuratively paints by numbers, however, the mother must back away from each painted stroke in order to consider the intricacy of the work while maintaining the painting's careful composition. In both metaphors, the mother accomplishes the "impossible" by assaying excess. Through her "art inespéré" (the process of reconfigurations), she

becomes "équitable," that is, she maintains an impartiality, a fairness that can be characterized here as an equilibrium. In short, the mother functions as "Colette"'s maternal signifier, receiver and redistributor of excess.

How does this maternal signifier function in "Colette"'s feminine imaginary? The opening section of the novel combines the maternal signifier with the creative moment described metaphorically as la naissance du jour. This first section begins with a letter written by "Colette"'s mother to "Colette"'s second husband, a letter that contains both desire's excess and the mother's redistribution of that excess through metaphor:

> Monsieur,
>
> Vous me demandez de venir passer une huitaine de jours chez vous, c'est-à-dire auprès de ma fille que j'adore. Vous qui vivez auprès d'elle, vous savez combien je la vois rarement, combien sa présence m'enchante, et je suis touchée que vous m'invitez à venir la voir. Pourtant, je n'accepterai pas votre aimable invitation, du moins pas maintenant. Voici pourquoi: mon cactus rose va probablement fleurir. C'est une plante très rare, que l'on m'a donnée, et qui, m'a-t-on dit, ne fleurit sous nos climats que tous les quatre ans. Or, je suis déjà une très vieille femme, et, si je m'absentais pendant que mon

> cactus rose va fleurir, je suis certaine de ne pas le voir refleurir une autre fois...
>
> Veuillez donc accepter, monsieur, avec mon remerciement sincère, l'expression de mes sentiments distingés et de mon regret. (NJ 5-6)

It is the mother who has redistributed her conflicting desires -- between visiting her beloved daughter and staying home surrounded by the daily gifts of her life -- into the metaphorically prickly pink cactus. As the opening section continues, "Colette" describes daybreak in her journal for the first time. In this dawning moment that reveals "Colette"'s feminine imaginary, both mother and daughter subject positions merge in both appearance and habit:

> Maintenant que je me défais peu à peu et que dans le miroir peu à peu je lui ressemble, je doute que, revenant, elle me reconnaisse pour sa fille, malgré la ressemblance de nos traits... A moins qu'elle ne revienne quand le jour poind à peine, et qu'elle ne me surprenne debout, aux aguets sur un monde endormi, éveillée, comme elle fut, comme souvent je suis, avant tous... (NJ 8)

In addition to a physical and habitual commonality, daybreak reveals the writing daughter's participation in the process of reconfigurations as she redistributes

excess between her own desire and that of her mother. Standing half-naked and trembling before the mother's spectral presence, "Colette" admits her excess, the passionate desire for physical love that she envisions as "une ombre d'homme." As the day breaks, the spectral presence recognizes "Colette"'s desire not as an excess but rather as her familiar pink cactus -- signifier par excellence of the maternal assaying process, a process in which the male shadow as symbol of "Colette"'s physical desire is reconfigured into a familiar vegetal shape:

> -- Ecarte-toi, laisse que je voie, me dirait ma très chère revenante... Ah! n'est-ce pas mon cactus rose qui me survit, et que tu embrasses? Qu'il a singulièrement grandi et changé!... Mais, en interrogeant ton visage, ma fille, je le reconnais. Je le reconnais à ta fièvre, à ton attente, au dévouement de tes mains ouvertes, au battement de ton coeur et au cri que tu retiens, au jour levant qui t'entoure, oui, je revendique tout cela. Demeure, ne te cache pas, et qu'on vous laisse tous deux en repos, toi et lui que tu embrasses, car il est bien, en vérité, mon cactus rose, qui veut enfin fleurir. (NJ 9)

Thus, within the feminine imaginary, "Colette" and her mother not only possess similar features and habits, but their commonality intensifies as they participate in the redistribution of a mutually recognizable desire. In

short, the "birth phase" that "Colette" locates and the actions that take place within it constitute a reconfiguration or a dissolving of boundaries between "Colette" and her mother. "Colette" achieves this new state by engaging the process of reconfigurations through the figure of the mother as assayer. By writing this process, "Colette" surpasses binary registers, creating instead juxtapositions such as "une ombre d'homme with "un cactus rose." It is this process of literary production that the epigraphical model represents. Neither the author nor a fictional character, the epigraphical model represents a textual function that encompasses a writing process of reconfigurations demonstrated through the maternal figure that assays desire into metaphorical recirculation within a feminine imaginary.

4. Both at Once

When "Colette" muses: "Ce n'est pas trop que de naître et de créer chaque jour" (NJ 242), she recalls the moment of merging during which "Colette" the writer circulates in both daughter ("naître") and mother ("créer") subject positions. At the break of day, "Colette" the writer is neither one nor two, but a vacillating combination of "motherdaughter" subject positions that intensifies her creative force, echoing Irigaray's "parler-femme" in which differentiations such as that between a writing subject

and its object no longer exist: "dans un parler-femme, il n'y a pas un sujet qui pose devant lui un objet. Il n'y a pas cette double polarité sujet-objet, énonciation/énoncé. Il y a une sorte de va-et-vient continu, du corps de l'autre à son corps" (Irigaray, Corps-à-corps 49-50). This auroral circulation ("une sorte de va-et-vient continu, du corps de l'autre à son corps") between vacillating "motherdaughter" subject positions within "Colette"'s feminine imaginary makes possible the undermining of distinctions between "Colette" as writing daughter (subject), written daughter (object), writing mother (subject), and written mother (object).[16]

At the end of her journal, "Colette" extends this subject/object indistinctness as the day breaks by applying the epigraphical model for writing to another character, Vial. Throughout the central portion of the novel, "Colette" has continued to assay her excessive need for physical love by valuing daily pleasures (gardening, swimming, eating, writing). In the process, she turns Vial, her young neighbor who loves her, away from herself and toward a younger woman who, "Colette" assures us, will eventually win his favor. As the text closes, "Colette" write a final redistribution, once again circulating her desire by exhorting Vial's spectral presence to return to her reconfigured:

Fuis mon favori! Ne reparais que méconnaissable.

> Saute la fenêtre, et en touchant le sol change, fleuris, vole, résonne... Lorsque tu me reviendras, il faut que je puisse te donner, à l'exemple de ma mère, ton nom de "Cactus rose" ou en je ne sais quelle autre fleur en forme de flamme, à éclosion pénible, ton nom futur de créature exorcisée. (NJ 240)

Just as in the opening journal entry, this final entry describes the moments of sunrise, and in a similar fashion, desire's excess will again reconfigure itself from fluid shadow to passionate flower. "Colette" extends her writing power in this final journal entry, raising the possibility that Vial may be reconfigured not only as the pink cactus exemplified through the maternal model, but as an endless chain of other flame-shaped flowers. This multi-floral possibility transforms itself into an ever-expanding signifying chain in which "Colette" reconfigures the subject, Vial, into a series of animate and inanimate object signifiers:

> Qu'elle prenne patience, la faim profonde du moment qui enfante le jour: l'ami ambigu qui sauta la fenêtre erre encore. Il n'a pas, en touchant le sol, abdiqué sa forme. Le temps lui a manqué pour se parfaire. Mais que je l'assiste seulement et le voici halliers, embruns, météores, livre sans bornes ouvert, grappe, navire, oasis... (NJ 245)

As the novel ends without ending through ellipses, so the chain of signifiers that re-place Vial's subject position suggests an infinite re-(s/c)iting.[17] By creating an inherent connection between the subject and seemingly disparate objects ("halliers, "embruns," "météores," "livres sans bornes ouvert," "grappe," "navire," "oasis"), "Colette" recalls a feminine imaginary in which merging "bits and pieces" momentarily preclude the alienation experienced by the subject in the Lacanian Imaginary. By linking disparate signifiers within a signifying chain, "Colette"'s writing, like the language effects that Irigaray envisions in her notion of a different "syntax," suggests not alienation, but a closeness or contiguity. For Irigaray,

> ce qui serait une syntaxe du féminin, ce n'est pas simple, ni aisé à dire, parce que dans cette "syntaxe" il n'y aurait plus ni sujet ni objet, le "un" n'y serait plus privilégié, il n'y aurait plus de sens propre, de nom propre, d'attributs "propres"... Cette "syntaxe" mettrait plutôt en jeu le proche, mais un si proche qu'il rendrait impossible toute discrimination d'identité, toute constitution d'appartenance, donc toute forme d'appropriation. (Ce Sexe 132, emphasis added)

Thus "Colette"'s reconfigurations ("halliers, embruns, météores, livre sans bornes ouvert, grappe, navire,

oasis...") constitute a deferring sequence, one that obscures the bar between subject and object, erasing proper names and multiplying signification by employing contiguous signifiers that ultimately destabilize the traditional notion of the "humanistically identified subject" (Smith 150) as well as the binary foundations of phallocentric discourse.

Describing Hélène Cixous's project in "Laugh of the Medusa," Morag Shiach could be discussing La Naissance du jour with equal accuracy: "So, the 'Laugh of the Medusa' is about the production of new representations that are ruinous to authority, to the 'empire of the self-same'" (158). Shiach's comments return me to the epigraphs, to the practice of portraiture that authoritatively represents the "self-same" by misrepresenting difference as "other." Unlike the phallocentric portraiture that Cixous describes, a portraiture which immobilizes ("Bouge pas") its female model as contained "object" or "other," the process of reconfigurations represented in "Colette"'s epigraphical model produces "subjectivities" that obscure subject and object boundaries within a differently imagined auroral space. Finally then, why does "Colette" insist that she is not producing a portrait? I suggest two possible responses: first, because the "subjectivities" that she produces through the act of writing literally cannot stand still, and second, because

the proximity inherent in her production of "subjectivities" undermine the binary foundations (subject/object, active/passive) of the phallocentric portrait-maker's art. In short, through her epigraphical model, "Colette" produces vital, vacillating "subjectivities" that may indeed inhabit an elsewhere "où l'autre n'y sera plus condamné à mort," an elsewhere that proves ultimately indiscernible to the phallocentric artist's unwavering eye/I.

NOTES

[1] Interestingly, even as the second epigraph dissociates itself from portrait-making, it reveals the passivity/activity dyad inherent in the language of portraiture. For, while the "model" takes the intransitive "être" ("c'est seulement mon modèle"), the "portrait" requires the transitive "faire" ("... que je fais mon portrait").

[2] For a succinct discussion of the position of the "other" and the "object" in psychoanalytic theory, see Gallop's The Daughter's Seduction 40, and Rose's "Introduction - II" 50. While a number of male theorists have greatly contributed to contemporary theories of subjectivity, feminist critics have systematically revealed many of them to be portrait-makers in that they assume a universality that precludes the consideration of gender and difference in their philosophical or theoretical systems. The epigraph cited from Cixous, replaced in context within "Le Rire de la Méduse," criticizes not only male psychoanalytical theories but also women who accept these theories uncritically and refers most specifically to the containment strategies which render "woman" as "object/other" in male-biased Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic systems.

In her critique of psychoanalysis, Irigaray notes that

the Western mythology upon which much psychoanalytic theory is based represses the "feminine": "Quand Freud décrit et théorise, notamment dans Totem et tabou, le meurtre du père comme fondateur de la horde primitive, il oublie un meurtre plus archaïque, celui de la femme-mère nécessité par l'établissement d'un certain ordre dans la cité" (Corps-à-corps 15-16). In the American context, addressing specifically linguistic myths in her assessment of psychoanalytical systems, Margaret Homans points out that "for the same reason that women are identified with nature and matter in any traditional thematics of gender, women are also identified with the literal, the absent referent in our predominant myth of language. From the point of view of this myth, the literal both makes possible and endangers the figurative structures of literature" (4). Having established this dichotomy between the literal and the figurative, Homans concludes that "in the Lacanian myth, language and gender are connected in such a way as to privilege implicitly the masculine and the figurative" (6).

Moreover, it is not only psychoanalytic theorists who elide gender issues. Teresa de Lauretis notes that Althusser, while contributing significantly to theorizing the subject within ideology, excludes gender in his theoretical and philosophical discourse: "The shift from 'subjects' to 'men and women' marks the conceptual

distance between two orders of discourse, the discourse of philosophy or political theory and the discourse of 'reality.' Gender is granted (and taken for granted) in the latter but excluded from the former. Although the Althusserian subject of ideology derives more from Lacan's subject (which is an effect of signification, founded on misrecognition) than from the unified class subject of Marxist humanism, it too is ungendered, as neither of these systems considers the possibility -- let alone the process of constitution -- of a female subject" (6). De Lauretis criticizes Foucault's La Volonté du savoir in a similar fashion, stating that his "critical understanding of the technology of sex did not take into account its diffential solicitation of male and female subjects, and by ignoring the conflicting investments of men and women in the discourses and practices of sexuality, Foucault's theory, in fact, excludes, though it does not preclude, the consideration of gender" (3).

While suggesting but a few examples of views held by feminist critics and theorists, these criticisms nonetheless suggest the extent to which phallocentrism pervades much of the discourse of contemporary theory and philosophy.

[3] While I have already considered this "elsewhere" in Chapter III from a spatial perspective, in this chapter, I will shift the focus from the "space" of this "elsewhere"

to the "subject" -- "l'autre [qui] n'y sera plus condamné à mort" -- that inhabits it.

[4] La Naissance du jour will be abbreviated in the text as NJ.

[5] In referring to the enfolding function that engages the text in dichotomous issues such as inclusion/exclusion and inside/outside, I rely most specifically on Derrida's discussion of "invagination" in "Survivre" and "La Loi du genre."

[6] In addition to Miller's useful insights concerning autobiography, her discussion of "new domains of subjectivity" (257) in "Woman of Letters: The Return to Writing in Colette's The Vagabond" serves as inspiration for my own examination of La Naissance du jour.

[7] In describing differing and deferring mechanisms in writing, I refer to Derrida's theory of writing. For a discussions of différance, see the essay "La Différance" (Marges de la philosophie), De la grammatologie 92 and Positions 37-41.

[8] Although the association of mother and water is an old one, this association has gained added importance in feminist discourse, offering "fluidity" as "solution" to a confining phallocentric language that privileges solids. For a striking example of the mère/mer metaphor in Cixous, see La 143 (cited in Stanton 166). For discussions of Irigaray's project concerning fluids, see Schor ("This

Essentialism"), and Burke.

[9] For an excellent commentary on the term jouissance, see Wing 165.

[10] The physiological metaphors prevalent in some French theories of difference have proven vexing to many feminist critics. For example, Ann Rosalind Jones notes that the calls from several French women theorists "for a verbal return to nature seem especially surprising coming from women who are otherwise (and rightly!) suspicious of language as penetrated by phallocentric dogma" (Writing the Body 373). Domna Stanton argues against physiological metaphors not so much from an essentialist perspective as from a deconstructive one, seeing such metaphors as a failed attempt to disrupt binary oppositions. For Stanton, "the feminine, the devalued term in phallologic, becomes the superior value, but the system of binary oppositions remains the same. . . . Judging from the present texts that explore la différence féminine, however, the maternal metaphor does not produce revelations so much as revalorizations or re-lodgings of topoi, images, and myths embedded in binary phallologic" (167-168).

[11] For other opinions on essentialism as a feminist strategy, see Hirsch 166 and Schor ("This Essentialism").

[12] I have not insisted on her conception of the "semiotic" in this chapter since Kristeva's theory of the

semiotic has been criticized for its adherence to a psychoanalytical model that continues to treat women as "others." On this treatment of women, see Jones ("Julia Kristeva on Femininity"), Homans 18-19, and Grosz 147-167. For an overview of Kristeva views regarding women's issues, see Jardine ("Opaque Texts"), and Rose ("Julia Kristeva: Take Two").

[13] Lacan states: "C'est que la forme totale du corps par quoi le sujet devance dans un mirage la maturation de sa puissance, ne lui est donnée que comme Gestalt, c'est-à-dire dans une extériorité où certes cette forme est-elle plus constituante que constituée, mais où surtout elle lui apparaît dans un relief de stature qui la fige et sous une symétrie qui l'inverse, en opposition à la turbulence de movements dont il s'éprouve l'animer" (Ecrits 94-95).

[14] Lacan writes: "Ce corps morcelé, dont j'ai fait aussi recevoir le terme dans notre système de références théoriques, se montre régulièrement dans les rêves, quand la motion de l'analyse touche à un certain niveau de désintégration agressive de l'individu" (Ecrits 97).

[15] While elaborating "la valeur du mot" remains the project of much contemporary theory, the notion of excess inherent in the gift, i.e. "la valeur des dons," resonates in Derrida (Eperons 89-96) and Cixous ("Le Rire de la

Méduse" 50).

[16] While I am arguing that the early bond between mother and daughter constitutes a creative locus for the woman writer (also see Brée 112), others would qualify or disagree with this position. Although Nancy Chodorow acknowledges that an early symbiotic relationship between mother and daughter often results in "a tendency in women toward boundary confusion and a lack of sense of separateness from the world" (110), Jessica Benjamin dismisses the possibility altogether, stating that an innate symbiosis between mother and infant does not exist. According to Benjamin, "what we see in early infancy is not symbiosis, or complete undifferentiation, but, rather, an interest in externality alternating with absorption in internal rhythms; later, there is alternation between the oneness of harmonious attunement and the 'two-ness' of disengagement" (49-50). While Chodorow admits a symbiotic relationship, she concludes that a "total merging and dependence are not desirable" since, as she observes, "merging brings the threat of loss of self or of being devoured as well as the benefit of omnipotence" (69). Irigaray envisions a "healthy" symbiotic relationship in her essay "Quand nos lèvres se parlent" (Ce Sexe 205-217), but she also explores the suffocating and parasitic relationship of mother and daughter within a patriarchal system in which the woman has no other identity than that

of the mother (Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre).

[17] In altering the signifier "re-place," I emphasize both the sense of substitution and the notion of constant relocation along the chain of signifiers. Similarly, by conflating "re-siting" and "re-citing," I further emphasize the constantly changing place of the signifier along the chain ("re-site") as well as the potentially infinite listing or enumeration of signifiers ("recite").

CONCLUSION

Considering Modernity: Reading Colette "A La Lettre"

> "Mais comment cet homme pas beau peut-il savoir que je suis moi, puisque j'ai tant de peine à le savoir moi-même?"
>
> -- Colette,
>
> L'Etoile Vesper

In this study, I have engaged seven of Colette's novels in a series of critical inquiries informed by diverse feminist theories. In Chapter I, I rely on embedded reading models that reveal the inherent duplicity within Chéri between narrative and textuality. In reading the text from the standpoint of equally duplicitous codes that govern feminine comportment during France's Belle Epoque, I locate sites of potential and actual scandalous eruption. In Chapter II, a destabilized temporal structure and the conflicting perception of temporality by male and female characters foregrounds the unconventional discursive treatment of retrospection that I have identified through "instances of reflection." Shifting between discursive levels, these "instances" defy conventional narratological categories and reinforce

feminist efforts to challenge traditional male-biased narratological models. In Chapter III, I shift my narratological consideration from temporality to the overdetermined romantic "endings" of female characters. In La Vagabonde, L'Entrave, Duo and Le Toutounier, the female protagonists deviate from cultural assimilation through marriage and subsequent confinement to the patriarchal home by resisting exclusionary male discourses of pleasure, by turning toward other women, and by occupying "defamiliarized" spaces beyond the patriarchal home. Finally, in Chapter IV, I concentrate on another site of destabilization, the auroral moments in La Naissance du jour in which the writing daughter produces shifting, expansive "subjectivities" from within a feminine imaginary. These "subjectivities" de-center phallocentric self-images and undermine the humanist notion of a unified subject by ultimately dissolving the boundaries between subject and object positions.

In bringing this study to its conclusion, I wish to consider briefly the question of "modernity" and its application to Colette's work in light of the various destabilizing effects that my readings have revealed. For the most part, critics categorize Colette's work as "modern" either from a chronological standpoint -- Colette writes during the first half of the century, the period deemed "modern" in terms of literary history -- or from

the standpoint of content -- Colette writes about issues that are relevant to the "modern" era. While such critical situations neatly contain Colette's work within established literary categories, I suggest that such a categorization precludes the consideration of Colette's work in relation to a related issue, that of "modernity." To this end, I wish to close this study by opening within it one final text, a text that I refer to as final not only in the positional sense of this study but also in a contextual sense -- it is the final maternal letter in La Naissance du jour. While "Colette" records the novel's preceding maternal letters in a traditional letter format, this last maternal missive receives a strikingly different textual treatment, rendering it, in Marianne Hirsch's words, "the avant-garde text par excellence" (106). In the closing pages of the novel, "Colette" writes:

> La dernière lettre, ma mère en l'écrivant voulut sans doute m'assurer qu'elle avait déjà quitté l'obligation d'employer notre langage. Deux feuillets crayonnés ne portent plus que des signes qui semblent joyeux, des flèches partant d'un mot esquissé, de petits rayons, deux "oui, oui" et un "elle a dansé" très net. Elle a écrit aussi, plus bas "mon amour" -- elle m'appelait ainsi quand nos séparations se faisaient longues et qu'elle s'ennuyait de moi. Mais j'ai scrupule cette fois de réclamer pour moi seule un mot si brûlant. Il

> tient sa place parmi des traits, des entrelacs d'hirondelle, des volutes végétales, parmi les messages d'une main qui tentait de me transmettre un alphabet nouveau, ou le croquis d'un site entrevu à l'aurore sous des rais qui n'atteindraient jamais le morne zénith. De sorte que cette lettre, au lieu de la contempler comme un confus délire, j'y lis un de ces paysages hantés où par jeu l'on cacha un visage dans les feuilles, un bras entre deux branches, un torse sous des noeuds de rochers... (NJ 243-244)

In effect, "Colette" de-scribes her mother's final letter in the sense that she "un-writes" it by ascribing to it a different graphic system that renders the letter virtually nonexistent à la lettre. Or, to state it another way, she creates la lettre sans la lettre which, like Barthes's exemplary listing of textes scriptibles in S/Z ("le romanesque sans le roman, la poésie sans le poème, l'essai sans la dissertation, l'écriture sans le style, la production sans le produit, la structuration sans la structure") requires a productive and not a consumptive reading (S/Z 11). While I will not claim that "Colette"'s "letter" coincides with Barthes's definition of le scriptible in every aspect (vestiges of le lisible can be found in any signifying system), I do contend that this text, like Barthes's concept of le scriptible, does

reflect a certain "modernity."

But in writing the word "modernity," to what am I actually referring? The answer is not a simple one. Contemporary theorists have defined the scope of modernism, postmodernism and the term derived from the French modernité in complex and contradictory fashions. For example, hesitating to define modernity, Alice Jardine first supplies a non-definition, i.e. that which modernity is not. For Jardine, modernity

> should not be confused (as it most often is in the United States) with "modernism" -- the generic label commonly attached to the general literary movement of the first half of the twentieth century. With "modernism," however, we are closest, at least in terms of the literary text, to what is of concern. It is the word "postmodern" as commonly used in the United States, that perhaps most accurately applies to the specific set of writers important here: those writing, self-consciously, from within the (intellectual, scientific, philosophical, literary) epistemological crisis specific to the postwar period. (Gynesis 23, emphasis in original)

If modernity is not modernism, but an intellectual movement that shares writers with what many American scholars call "postmodernism," my consideration of modernité must begin with modernism and postmodernism.

However, coming to terms with this pair presents a formidable challenge as a perusal of critical volumes addressing the topic of "postmodernism" will confirm.[1] Definitions of the "modern" and the "postmodern" differ greatly from volume to volume, pointing to the fact that no consensus exists on a generally accepted definition of either term or of the interrelationship between them. What does seem evident enough is that modernism and postmodernism depend on each other in both definition and function, a conjunction that Lyotard emphasizes concerning twentieth-century art and literature when he answers the question, "Qu'est-ce que le postmoderne?":

> Voici donc le différend: l'esthétique moderne est une esthétique du sublime, mais nostalgique; elle permet que l'imprésentable soit allégué seulement comme un contenu absent, mais la forme continue à offrir au lecteur ou au regardeur, grâce à sa consistance reconnaissable, matière à consolation et à plaisir. . . . Le postmoderne serait ce qui dans le moderne allègue l'imprésentable dans la présentation elle-même; ce qui se refuse à la consolation des bonnes formes, au consensus d'un goût qui permettrait d'éprouver en commun la nostalgie de l'impossible; ce qui s'enquiert de présentations nouvelles, non pas pour en jouir, mais pour mieux faire sentir qu'il y a de l'imprésentable. (366-367)[2]

Similarly, locating his definition of modernism in certain nineteenth-century texts considered "oppositional" in light of their textual resistance to censorship, Ross Chambers also suggests an interdependence between modernism and postmodernism:

> L'identité du mélancolique, qui est faite du sentiment d'un manque de solide . . . sera donc la vérité du modernisme (ce qu'on appelle "postmodernisme" étant peut-être une manière non-mélancolique, pour ne pas dire joyeuse, d'<u>assumer</u> les conséquences de l'experience mélancolique: une sorte de modernisme sans pathos du manque). (Mélancolie 224)

These two definitions, Lyotard's and Chambers's, have important elements in common. In both cases, the authors perceive modernism as a certain void or lack ("un contenu absent" or "un manque de solide") which the modern writer or artist expresses through recognizable literary and artistic forms. For both authors, postmodernism functions in a direct relation to modernism. For Lyotard, modernism and postmodernism constitute simultaneous movements, the postmodern distinguishing itself from the modern by its more emphatic denaturalization of recognizable (and therefore to some extent realistic) artistic forms. For Chambers, a similar dynamic prevails: while the modern characterizes itself through the melancholic expression of a lack of solidity, the postmodern plays up this lack in

almost celebratory ways that would further undermine the notion of literary realism.[3]

It is in this heightened, self-conscious challenge to existing forms in literature and art that postmodernism and modernité converge. As Jardine argues, modernity is less a question of periodization than a "wide ranging search for instabilities" ("in the name" 174) that denaturalize "the world that humanism naturalized, a world whose anthro-pology and anthro-centrism no longer make sense" (Gynesis 24). For Jardine, "it is a strange new world they [the theorists of modernity] have invented, a world that is unheimlich. And such strangeness has necessitated speaking and writing in new and strange ways" (Gynesis 24). Returning to Colette's writing, then, the question becomes: is the modernity that Jardine describes reflected in the final, maternal "letter" and, by extension, in the novels included in this study? In considering Jardine's periodization, a first response might be that Colette has nothing to do with modernity if for no other than chronological reasons. While Colette's work spans the first (or modern) half of the twentieth century, most of her work cannot explicitly address a "crisis specific to the postwar period" (Gynesis 23, emphasis added). On the other hand, the final maternal missive, as I will show, does constitute a "writing in new and strange ways" (Gynesis 24). By intertextualizing

"Colette"'s "letter" and Barthes's texte scriptible, I have involved Colette's text in the project of modernity, that "wide ranging search for instabilities" ("in the name" 174). And while Colette does not belong historically to the period that Jardine delineates as that of modernity, Barthes does belong to this period and does reflect, through the progression of his writing, a constant attempt to denaturalize existing epistemological systems. In Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, Barthes especially challenges the traditional notion of autobiography, to the point of questioning the necessity of signifying systems altogether: "N'avons-nous pas assez de liberté pour recevoir un texte hors de toute lettre?" (104, emphasis in original). And with this question, I return once again to La Naissance du jour and to the "letter" whose newly devised alphabet does not exist as letters, to a "letter" that is literally "hors de toute lettre."

Through her de-scription of the final maternal missive, "Colette" does exhibit a strange new way of writing -- or, more precisely, of not writing. Over several pages at the end of Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, Barthes draws deliberately unfamiliar graphic signifiers (which could perhaps be likened to the "petits rayons" or "des entrelacs d'hirondelle") in order to represent them as floating signifiers, or even as lettres

sans lettres, with which he juxtaposes the inscription: "La graphie pour rien ... ou le signifiant sans signifié" (187-189). Unlike Barthes, however, "Colette" chooses to de-scribe her unfamiliar signifiers rather than to reproduce them, thereby preventing any visualization of the "letter" in graphic form. In the process, the alphabetic "letters" ("oui, oui," "mon amour," "elle a dansé"), through their intersection with these graphic signifiers, lose any referentiality that they may have had. In reading "mon amour," for example, "Colette"'s first impulse is to assign a personal signification to this expression ("elle m'appelait ainsi quand nos séparations se faisaient longues et qu'elle s'ennuyait de moi"). However, she resists this impulse as she contemplates "mon amour" among the vegetal and bird-like scriptings, recognizing in this ardent expression an unbounded feminine jouissance ("Mais j'ai scrupule cette fois de réclamer pour moi seule un mot si brûlant"). By interspersing the alphabetical letters with de-scriptions of unfamiliar signifiers that resemble spiraling plants and tracings of birds in flight, "Colette" weaves recognizable alphabetic signifiers into a fabric of graphic signifiers that "denaturalizes" linguistic norms ("notre langage").[4] This interweaving of the letters of a familiar alphabet ("oui, oui," "elle a dansé," "mon amour") with the convolutions of "natural" movements ("des

entrelacs d'hirondelle, des volutes végétales") produces a strange new discursive system in which alphabetical letters can no longer combine to create a straightforward correspondence between signifier and signified. Engulfed in the flora and fauna of an inscribed "paysage hanté," signification can only be approached playfully, as a not-before-seen game of hidden pictures in which the supernatural landscape absorbs a dispersed signifying corpus ("un visage dans les feuilles, "un bras entre deux branches," "un torse sous des noeuds de rochers").

Christiane Makward notes that this supernatural scene, shaped around "a hieroglyphic language," is "left to the reader to 'picture,' perhaps in the style of Miro's paintings" (189). In Makward's sense, "to picture" becomes a singularly playful and productive effort. Such playfulness resounds both in "Colette"'s "paysage hanté" and in Barthes's definition of <u>le scriptible</u>:

> Dans ce texte idéal, les réseaux sont multiples et jouent entre eux, sans qu'aucun puisse coiffer les autres; ce texte est une galaxie de signifiants, non une structure de signifiés; il n'a pas de commencement; il est réversible; on y accède par plusieurs entrées dont aucune ne peut être à coup sûr déclarée principale . . . Tout ceci revient à dire que pour le texte pluriel, il ne peut y avoir de structure narrative, de grammaire ou de logique du récit . . .

(S/Z 12)

As in Barthes's texte scriptible, the comparison of the "letter" to a hidden picture puzzle suggests that the "letter" can be read beginning from any point and continuing in any direction. Moreover, as in Barthes's definition, "Colette"'s epistolary description contains no formal structure (unlike the preceding letters in the text, this "letter" is not expressed in a traditional epistolary format), no unifying grammar (the juxtaposition of alphabetical with de-scribed signifiers), and no overt message (the signifiers in the letter circulate randomly like the disparate objects in a paysage hanté). In short, "Colette"'s "letter" corresponds in significant ways to Barthes's texte scriptible and, by extension, to a certain modernité.

In representing the "letter" with both alphabetical and graphic signifiers, "Colette" also engages in the larger question of écriture, the play between presence and absence that grounds Derrida's critical inquiry. "Colette"'s "letter" which is not one circulates "present" alphabetic signifiers ("oui, oui," "elle a dansé," "mon amour") and "absent" graphic signifiers ("des entrelacs d'hirondelle," "des volutes végétales") in a gesture which, like Derrida's concept of écriture, inhabits a different space, one that is neither presence nor absence. The "letter" becomes, in essence, a trace that is

"paradoxically there and, as a sign of absence, not there at the same time" (Brunette and Wills 7). While I will not develop in detail the intertextual references to Derrida in "Colette"'s text, I wish to suggest that within this vacillating "letter," "mon amour", "oui, oui" and "elle a dansé" swirl as expressions of feminine jouissance. Derrida links two of these expressions in his own theory, developing "oui, oui" (from Blanchot's "La Folie du jour") as the feminine affirmation or, to use a different-but-equivalent term, the hymen, in his essays "La Loi du genre" and "Survivre." The second expression, "elle a dansé" again circulates "woman" ("elle" -- the feminine operation), this time in connection with the dance or mime. In Eperons, Derrida asks: "Sous quel pas s'ouvre cette Dis-tanz?" (37), a question which recalls both Mallarmé's "Mimique" (and thus the hymen) as well as writing, that dis-tancing function. Just as the "hymen," with its contradictory double sense, precludes sense-making in a deferring gesture, so "oui, oui" and "elle a dansé" circulate in the absent "letter" as destabilizing elements that can be linked neither to signifieds nor referents. Dispersed into (an)other language ("un alphabet nouveau"), they function as both excess and deferral.[5]

It is certainly possible that theories beyond that of Barthes's "polysémie" and Derrida's "écriture" -- theories

of other male theorists of modernity -- could also be found in "Colette"'s "letter." But more importantly for this study, Colette's "letters," in the wider literary sense of the term, resound in their intertextuality with women theorists who, in challenging the gendered stances of their male colleagues, have begun to theorize modernity from other than androcentric perspectives. By writing "this 'letter' which is not one" in the preceding paragraph, I recall Luce Irigaray's complex and defiant description of female sexuality as "ce sexe qui n'en est pas un," a description that exposes the phallocentric bias of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis grounded in the specularity of Western patriarchal tradition:

> Ce sexe qui ne donne pas à voir n'a pas non plus de forme propre. Et si la femme jouit justement de cette incomplétude de forme de son sexe qui fait qu'il se re-touche infiniment lui-même, cette jouissance est déniée par une civilisation qui privilégie le phallomorphisme. La valeur accordée à la seule forme définissable barre celle en jeu dans l'auto-érotisme féminin. Le <u>un</u> de la forme, de l'individu, du sexe, du nom propre, du sens propre... supplante, en écartant et divisant, ce toucher d'<u>au moins deux</u> (lèvres) qui maintient la femme en contact avec elle-même, mais sans discrimination possible de ce qui se touche. (Ce Sexe 26, emphasis in original).

Like the female sexual organs that are "hidden" from view, "Colette"'s "letter" frustrates specularity through seeming absence. And while the "letter" is not one (i.e. a letter), it is also not one (i.e. simple, singular), but rather a plurality of possible signifying combinations that resembles the plurality that Irigaray expresses as feminine jouissance:

> le plaisir de la femme n'a pas à choisir entre activité clirotidienne et passivité vaginale, par exemple. Le plaisir de la caresse vaginale n'a pas à se substituer à celui de la caresse clitoridienne. Ils concourent l'un et l'autre, de manière irremplaçable, à la jouissance de la femme. Parmi d'autres... La caresse des seins, le toucher vulvaire, l'entr'ouverture des lèvres, le va-et-vient d'une pression sur la paroi postérieure du vagin, l'effleurement du col de la matrice, etc. (Ce Sexe 127-128)

Such a metaphorical plurality suggests a multiplicity of correspondences between signifiers and signifieds that precludes "logical" sense-making. Recognizing the possibility of alternative readings, "Colette" refuses to privilege a reading that would limit the burning expressions of feminine jouissance in her mother's final "letter" ("Mais j'ai scrupule cette fois de réclamer pour moi seule un mot si brûlant"). It is, perhaps, this

recognition and writing of feminine jouissance to which Hélène Cixous refers in naming Colette one of only three authors in twentieth-century French literature to have written "de la féminité" (Méduse 42). Significantly, in writing female jouissance, Cixous invokes the female body in a way that could equally describe "Colette"'s "letter":

> le corps de la femme aux mille et un foyers d'ardeur, quand elle le laissera -- fracassant les jougs et censures -- articuler le foisonnement des significations qui en tous sens le parcourt... (Méduse 48)

Whether through provocative female body metaphors, through challenges to traditional gender codes, or through psychoanalytic rethinking of the feminine, feminist theorists have informed my readings of Colette's novels in substantial ways. While much has been written on Colette, consideration of her personal life has overly influenced the critical evaluation of her works, as I emphasized in the introduction, only recently have critics begun to explore Colette in other than biographical terms. I consider this shift from Colette's person to her writing a felicitous one that I attribute in large part to critical breakthroughs made possible by feminist studies. As Craig Owens remarks in reference to postmodernism, it is, after all, "the existence of feminism, with its insistence on

difference [that] forces us to reconsider" (77). While, in reconsidering Colette's works, critics have disagreed about her feminist "status," my own reconsideration of seven of her novels has revealed modes of resistance to various systems of power, modes that destabilize the grounding notions of patriarchy, modes that I ultimately identify as feminist for their emphasis on the epistemological interrogation and challenge, modes that reflect the project of modernity which Jardine characterizes as a "wide ranging search for instabilities" ("in the name" 174). Thus, I involve Chéri, La Fin de Chéri, La Vagabonde, L'Entrave, Duo, Le Toutounier and La Naissance du jour in the modernist project to the extent that these novels raise in striking ways contemporary feminist issues. In reconsidering these seven novels, my principle purpose has been to read Colette's texts in non-biographical ways. In doing so, I have located in them strategies that coincide with those of modernity, strategies suggesting an on-going theoretical inquiry that ultimately produces, to return to Colette's text one last time, a "livre sans bornes ouvert" (NJ 245).

NOTES

[1] I refer here to recent critical offerings by Foster, Huyssens, and Ross.

[2] For Lyotard's definition of the sublime, see 363-364.

[3] In The Poetics of Postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon notes that the modernist/postmodernist debate breaks into two opposing views: either postmodernism constitutes a "radical break" from modernism or a "relationship of continuity" with it (50-51). In resolving for herself the polarity that she describes above, Hutcheon more closely reflects Chambers and Lyotard: "I see as one of the many contradictions of postmodernism that it can both self-consciously incorporate and equally self-consciously challenge that modernism from which it derives and to which it owes even its verbal existence" (51-52).

[4] Nancy K. Miller also remarks on the transformation of the legible words within this new writing: "The distinguishable words, however, only assume meaning within the context of the dancing signs themselves; they are hieroglyphs, really, beyond the obligations of their habitual language of exchange" ("Anamnesis" 169-170).

[5] In referring to "l'opération féminine," I cite Eperons 44. Derrida links the feminine affirmation ("oui, oui") and the hymen in the "Borderlines" portion of his

essay "Survivre": "L'hymen (l'alliance, la réaffirmation, 'Oui, oui,' 'Viens,' etc.) est relié, dans L'arrêt de mort, et de façon thématique à ce qui engage 'dans la langue de l'autre'" (138). He makes a similar link in "La Loi du genre": "Elle n'a donc rien d'une présentation de soi. Mais la double négation donne le passage à une double affirmation (oui, oui) qui se lie ou s'allie à elle-même. Faisant alliance ou hymen avec elle-même, cette double affirmation sans limite dit un oui sans mesure, excessif, immense: et à la vie et à la mort" (194). For a cogent discussion of "the hymen," see Brunette and Wills 78-83.

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